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THESIS

**LOSING INFLUENCE: REGIONAL EFFECTS OF U.S.
FOREIGN POLICY WITH VENEZUELA**

by

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WITH VENEZUELA**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the degree to which U.S. policy toward Venezuela helps to explain the decrease of U.S. influence in Latin America, focusing on the period since 1998, when left-leaning Hugo Chávez took office as President of Venezuela. The thesis argues that U.S. foreign policy toward Venezuela has negatively affected its regional influence in Latin America, in two ways. First, by adopting policy stances toward Venezuela that have been both swift and hardline relative to the dominant Organization of American States (OAS) stances, the U.S. has to a certain degree isolated itself from the OAS, an organization that operates on consensus. Second, it seems that U.S. antagonism toward Venezuela has helped encourage the rise of regional organizations that compete with the OAS and in which the U.S. is not a part. Therefore, to the extent to which the U.S. has retained influence in the OAS, that influence matters less at a regional level than it otherwise would, due to the competing organizations. The thesis argues that, to regain some of its lost influence within Latin America, the United States must first pursue matters of mutual agreement within the OAS to regain trust from the member states. From there, the United States can once again engage in effective foreign policy with Venezuela, but through the OAS as an intermediary.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACI	Andean Counterdrug Initiative
AD	Democratic Action
ALBA	Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America
ARI	Andean Regional Initiative
ATPA	Andean Trade Preference Act
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
COPEI	Christian Democratic Party
CRS	Congressional Research Service
CTV	Venezuelan Workers' Confederation
DEA	Drug Enforcement Agency
DNI	Director of National Intelligence
ELPV	Liberation Army of the Venezuelan People
ESF	Economic Support Funds
EU	European Union
FARC	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia
FEDECAMARAS	Venezuelan Federation of Chambers and Associations of Commerce and Production
FTAA	Free Trade Area of the Americas
ICE	Immigrations and Customs Enforcement
ICSID	International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes
MAS	Movement for Socialism
MBR-200	Bolivarian Revolutionary Movement 200
MERCOSUR	Southern Common Market
MUD	Democratic Unity Roundtable
MVR	Fifth Republic Movement
NED	National Endowment for Democracy
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OAS	Organization of American States
OPEC	Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries
PDVSA	Petroleum of Venezuela

PPT	Fatherland for Everyone
PSUV	United Socialist Party of Venezuela
RCTV	Radio Caracas Television
UN	United Nations
UNASUR	Union of South American Nations
URD	Democratic Republican Union
USSOUTHCOM	United States Southern Command

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. BASIS FOR THESIS

The December 1998 election of Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez Frías marked, for many experts on Latin America, a shift in the political landscape of Latin America and U.S. influence in the region. Chávez, elected on a platform centered on reforming the constitution and promoting social development and equality, was viewed by many academics as leading the rise of a “new left” in Latin America, and, from the perspective of many U.S. policy makers, a dangerous one at that, given his strong anti-American rhetoric and his enthusiasm for Latin-America-based coalitions that contrasted with traditional U.S. hegemony in the region.

Chávez’s populist rule (1999–2013) did, indeed, veer far afield from the prior political dynamic in Venezuela, whereby two entrenched, famously corrupt political parties had governed comfortably through the distribution of oil wealth in the form of patronage.¹ And in terms of relations with the United States, Chávez put forth a policy of weakening dependence on the U.S. hegemon throughout the region.² Prior to the election of Chávez, the United States and Venezuela had long served as allies thanks to years of mutual trade and investment.³ Over the next 15 years however, quite the opposite happened as Chávez embarked on a back-and-forth campaign of anti-American rhetoric that lasted until his death in 2013. In his place, he left behind a politically polarized nation with an uncertain future.⁴

There is no doubt that relations between the United States and Venezuela deteriorated from the early 2000s until the present, particularly following the 2002 coup

1 Steve Ellner, “Introduction: The Search for Explanations,” in *Venezuelan Politics in the Chávez Era: Class, Polarization & Conflict*, eds. Steve Ellner and Daniel Hellinger (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2003), 15–17.

2 Daniel Hellinger, “Political Overview: The Breakdown of Puntofijismo and the Rise of Chavismo,” in *Venezuelan Politics in the Chávez Era: Class, Polarization & Conflict*, eds. Steve Ellner and Daniel Hellinger (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2003), 46.

3 Mark P. Sullivan, *Venezuela: Political Conditions and U.S. Policy* (CRS Report No. RL32488) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, January 17, 2006), 12.

4 Javier Corrales, “Chavismo After Chávez,” *Foreign Affairs*, January 4, 2013, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/138745/javier-corrales/chavismo-after-chavez>.

in Venezuela, where Chávez placed at least some of the blame on the United States. Whether it was then-Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld comparing Chávez to Adolf Hitler on February 2, 2006; Chávez referring to President George W. Bush as the devil in front of the United Nations (UN) National Assembly on September 20, 2006; or the administration of President Barack Obama revoking the diplomatic visa of the Venezuelan Ambassador to the United States in 2010; there have been countless actions by both sides that serve to prove the point.⁵

Furthermore, as a whole, the United States has lost influence both politically and economically in Latin America.⁶ For example, a rising global power in China has worked its way into the markets of many Latin American states. As of 2012, countries such as Brazil, Venezuela, and Chile all export more goods to China than they do to the United States.⁷ In the political realm, the United States no longer holds the same power that it used to in one of Latin America's most important regional organizations: the Organization of American States (OAS). Whereas states used to side with the United States, they are now more than ever presenting independent foreign policy choices.⁸

Yet to what extent were Chávez and his policies, and perhaps his rhetoric alone, and U.S. responses to Chávez, responsible for decreased U.S. influence in Latin America? If such a causal relationship does exist, what policy shifts should the U.S. undertake vis-à-vis Venezuela to improve its relations with the region more broadly?

⁵ Mark P. Sullivan, *Venezuela: Political Conditions and U.S. Policy* (CRS Report No. RL32488) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, November 15, 2006), 19-20; Mark P. Sullivan, *Venezuela: Issues for Congress* (CRS Report No. R40938) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, March 29, 2012), 18.

⁶ Roberto Russell and Juan Gabriel Tokatlian, "Beyond Orthodoxy: Asserting Latin America's New Strategic Options Toward the United States," *Latin American Politics & Society* 53, no. 4 (2011): 137, doi: 10.1111/j.1548-2456.2011.00136 x.

⁷ "Trade Profiles," World Trade Organization, accessed March 3, 2014, <http://stat.wto.org/CountryProfile/WSDBCountryPFView.aspx?Language=E&Country=AR,BR,CA,CL,CO,MX,PA,PE,VE,CR>.

⁸ Peter J. Meyer, *Organization of American States: Background and Issues for Congress* (CRS Report No. R42639) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, April 8, 2013), 1-2.

B. IMPORTANCE

This thesis is relevant for two primary reasons: the U.S. government has (1) lost influence in a region of strategic importance and (2) highlighted Venezuela as a key area of contention in Latin America. Are the concerns that arose during the rise of Chávez justified and are they connected to loss of influence in the region?

The United States has always had ties to Latin America, and not just because of proximity. In *Modern Latin America*, Thomas E. Skidmore, Peter H. Smith, and James N. Green highlight economic interests, political links, and the Latinization of the United States as reasons why the region matters.⁹ Throughout much of history, the relationship has been one-sided, the dominant view in the literature being that the United States was the benefactor, exploiting Latin America. Reasons range from dependency theory, a complex idea in its own right, to U.S. imperialism and a multitude of explanations in between.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the tables have seemed to shift recently with Latin American states behaving in ways that go against U.S. interests. Making matters more complicated, Venezuela can be found at the heart of many of these challenges to U.S. authority. For example, the OAS met on March 7, 2014, to discuss recent civil unrest in Venezuela. The United States argued that the government of Venezuela was behind human rights violations and was demoting democracy in the region. When it came time to vote, however, the United States stood alongside Panama and Canada as the only OAS members to disagree with the resolution that asked for solidarity and support for democratic institutions, dialogue, and peace in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.¹¹ Up to this point, the United States had identified the situation as one where the elected government of Venezuela was committing serious human rights violations against its citizens and refusing to negotiate with opposition. Expecting other members to agree that

⁹ Thomas E. Skidmore, Peter H. Smith, and James N. Green, *Modern Latin America*, 7th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 3-4.

¹⁰ Robert A. Packenham, *The Dependency Movement: Scholarship and Politics in Development Studies* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 7-32.

¹¹ Permanent Council of the OAS, "Solidarity and Support for Democratic Institutions, Dialogue, and Peace in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela," Organization of American States, March 7, 2014, <http://www.oas.org/consejo/resolutions/dec51.asp>.

the OAS must take action, the United States was instead surprised by the organization's choice to honor a policy of non-intervention.¹²

When looking back even further, one can see the shift away from U.S. influence beginning to form. As the United States was making its case for war with Iraq in 2003, it approached the UN Security Council seeking an approved UN resolution for military action. Latin America's representatives, Chile and Mexico—non-permanent members on the Security Council—did not support the use of force in Iraq. What would have been valuable votes in favor of the United States instead ended contradictory to U.S. expectations.¹³ Meanwhile, Chávez was denouncing the U.S. actions and meeting with Saddam Hussein of Iraq and other important leaders of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).¹⁴ If the United States wants to understand the factors that are contributing to loss of influence in Latin America, it must first understand the role of Venezuela in the region. There has been little research into the second and third order effects generated by foreign policy toward Venezuela. Perhaps exploring this avenue will provide options for regaining support in Latin America.

C. PROBLEMS

The first and most important problem in answering the question posed by this thesis is defining what in fact U.S. foreign policy has been in relation to Venezuela. Foreign policy is difficult to describe in the sense that it can be split into two distinct categories that often present a different picture: what is said and what is done. There are many ways to determine foreign policy through political speech, including press releases, governmental reports, and speeches given by government officials to Congress and to the media. The problem becomes more complex because the messages presented are not always cohesive. For example, the President may provide broad, generalized guidance for

12 Mark P. Sullivan, *Venezuela: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. R43239) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, April 11, 2014), 18.

13 Mónica Serrano and Paul Kenny, "Iraq and World Order: A Latin American Perspective," in *The Iraq Crisis and World Order: Structural, Institutional, and Normative Challenges*, eds. Ramesh Thakur and Waheguru Pal Singh Sidhu (New York: United Nations University Press, 2006), 311-312.

14 Steve Ellner, *Rethinking Venezuelan Politics: Class, Conflict, and the Chávez Phenomenon* (Boulder, CO: Lynn Rienner Publishers, 2008), 136.

how to handle relations with Venezuela. Officials in the Department of Defense and Department of State, making the messages even more disparate as they trickle down, may then interpret this broad guidance differently.

Complicating matters even more, the United States has performed inconsistently with its political rhetoric. Certain basic dimensions of U.S. relations with Venezuela have been relatively smooth despite U.S. antagonism toward Chávez. For example, on September 15, 2005, President Bush denounced Venezuela for failing to uphold international agreements, yet he refused to implement economic sanctions.¹⁵ More generally, from the year 2000 until present day, the United States has consistently denounced both President Chávez and now President Nicolás Maduro for their policies across a range of topics, including violation of human rights, counternarcotics operations on the Venezuelan border with Colombia, and threats to freedom of expression. All the while, the two countries continued to maintain a strong economic relationship.¹⁶ This paradoxical relationship has the potential to create confusion and mistrust within the region as statements by the United States fail to match up with its actions.

Crucially, the disjuncture between U.S. rhetoric and actions vis-à-vis Venezuela also runs in the other direction. The United States, which supposedly since the conclusion of the Cold War has adamantly supported democracy throughout Latin America, stood alone in the hemisphere in 2002 when it recognized the right-wing, short-lived government of Pedro Carmona who came to power via a military coup against Chávez.¹⁷

The second problem presented by this thesis is attempting to show that the actions of the United States with regard to Venezuela either have or have not had an effect on other countries in the region. The thesis will present a hard test of the hypothesis that there has been such an effect, by examining whether or not the influence of the United

15 Mark P. Sullivan, *Venezuela: Political Conditions and U.S. Policy* (CRS Report No. RL32488) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, September 23, 2005), 11.

16 Mark P. Sullivan, *Venezuela: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. R43239) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, September 23, 2005), 16–32.

17 Peter H. Smith, *Democracy in Latin America: Political Change in Comparative Perspective*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 106–107.; K. Larry Storrs et al., *Latin America and the Caribbean: Legislative Issues in 2001-2002* (CRS Report No. RL30971) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, April 18, 2002), 21.

States within the OAS—traditionally influenced substantially by the U.S. government—has changed, and whether that change was in part a result of the country’s policies toward Venezuela.

D. LITERATURE REVIEW

The bulk of writing on Venezuela since the start of the new millennium has focused on Hugo Chávez. This emphasis perhaps should not be surprising, as Chávez stands out for being democratically elected on a social development platform, radically anti-United States—at least in his rhetoric—and highly charismatic. The unfortunate downside of the Chávez magnet is that he has attracted nearly all literature to himself, both domestically and internationally. Left behind to secondhand comments in articles is the role of the United States. While Chávez almost inevitably attributed a problem to the United States each time he spoke, there is little attention paid to the policy actions taken by the United States toward Venezuela, and even less attention paid to how those policies affect other states within the region.

For many academics, the election of President Obama and the departure of President Bush presented the perfect opportunity for reconciliation between the two states. In her chapter “Engaging Venezuela: 2009 and Beyond,” Jennifer McCoy proposed the United States pursue a policy of engagement instead of isolation. She acknowledges the difficulty in this policy due to the Bolivarian Revolution having a goal of lessening U.S. dominance in Latin America, so instead she recommends promoting democracy through the international community. Through Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) and regional organizations, such as the OAS, she thinks progress can be made to better U.S.-Venezuelan relations.¹⁸ Following along the same idea that direct U.S. action regarding Venezuela will become fuel for propaganda, Harold Trinkunas also calls on the international community. In his article “Venezuela Breaks Down in Violence,” Trinkunas states that it is nearly impossible for the United States to gain ground through interaction with Venezuela, and that the OAS is too bogged down

¹⁸ Jennifer McCoy, “Engaging Venezuela: 2009 and Beyond,” in *The Obama Administration and the Americas: Agenda for Change*, eds. Abraham F. Lowenthal, Theodore J. Piccone, and Laurence Whitehead (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2009), 161–165.

with political egos to actually invoke the Inter-American Democratic Charter, which would force an OAS resolution against Venezuela. The United States should instead reach out to other regional and international partners that may have more influence.¹⁹ While the idea by both authors to engage the international community is an important one, it is too early to give up hope on the OAS.

By and large, the most consistent recommendations on U.S. foreign policy have come from Congressional Research Service (CRS) reports, many of which are put together by Mark P. Sullivan. Since the early 2000s, Sullivan has continually highlighted the importance of preserving democracy, keeping access to Venezuelan oil reserves, and continuing counternarcotics operations.²⁰ In 2005, the importance of guerilla groups' crossing over the border from Colombia also became a focus.²¹ The main problem with CRS Reports is that they do not consider second- or third-order effects that may be generated from policy recommendations. They are also designed to provide information and not necessarily a specific position. This requires comparisons to actual state actions and significant research to attempt to determine correlations.

Yet another important aspect of the literature is showing that the United States has actually lost influence in the region. One could argue that Chávez's rise occurred precisely when the United States was at its weakest in terms of international influence. Steve Ellner clarifies why: "Chávez's denunciations of U.S. imperialism after 2003 coincided with the widespread recognition of the fragility and vulnerability of U.S. economic power, the loss of U.S. prestige as a result of the invasion of Iraq, and the Bush administration's subordination of pressing worldwide economic problems to the war on terrorism."²² Other indicators of a shift in U.S. influence are present when regional organizations either act contrary to U.S. interests or without its presence at all. For

19 Harold Trinkunas, "Venezuela Breaks Down in Violence," Brookings Institution, uploaded January 23, 2014, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2014/01/venezuela-breaks-down-violence-trinkunas>.

20 K. Larry Storrs et al., *Latin America and the Caribbean: Legislative Issues in 2001* (CRS Report No. RL30971) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, October 10, 2001), 16.

21 Mark P. Sullivan, *Venezuela: Political Conditions and U.S. Policy* (CRS Report No. RL32488) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, January 14, 2005), 12–13.

22 Ellner, *Rethinking Venezuelan Politics*, 202.

example, the OAS opted to incorporate Cuba, the long-time rival of the United States, in 2009.²³ Challenging the United States on both economic and political fronts, Venezuela has also helped create or partake in two political and economic regional organizations. Although the presence of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) and the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) alone does not necessarily signify a weaker United States, the fact that they endure to this day demonstrates that they do provide something that the United States cannot.²⁴

E. METHODS AND SOURCES

Because of the complexity of defining U.S. foreign policy with Venezuela over a 14-year period, the thesis will spend a significant amount of time comparing official documents that were presented during both the Bush and Obama administrations. The analysis will include CRS Reports for Congress, posture statements from the Commander of United States Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) and the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (DASD) for Western Hemisphere Affairs (WHA), and Congressional Testimonies among other publicly available documents. The proposal will then compare and contrast the statements over time in an effort to find a single, whole-of-government policy. Gaps and inconsistencies will be highlighted as potential causes for loss of U.S. influence throughout Latin America. Having defined the stated intentions of the U.S. government, the proposal will move on to analyzing actions undertaken by the United States, including economic sanctions, withdraw and expulsion of diplomats, adherence to extradition requests, and other non-economic actions. The intent of this analysis is to find out whether or not the stated U.S. objectives matched the actions. Once again, any difference will be highlighted for its possible value in explaining loss of U.S. influence in the region thanks to inconsistent policies.

23 Luis Suárez Salazar, "The Current Crisis of U.S. Domination Over the Americas," *Critical Sociology* 38, no. 2 (2012): 185, doi: 10.1111/j.1548-2456.2011.00136 x.

24 Theodore J. Piccone, "Supporting Democracy in the Americas: The Case for Multilateral Action," in *The Obama Administration and the Americas: Agenda for Change*, eds. Abraham F. Lowenthal, Theodore J. Piccone, and Laurence Whitehead (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2009), 55–57; Laurence Whitehead, "A Project for the Americas," in *The Obama Administration and the Americas: Agenda for Change*, eds. Abraham F. Lowenthal, Theodore J. Piccone, and Laurence Whitehead (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2009), 223.

With the intentions and actions of the United States toward Venezuela fully explored throughout the Chávez and Maduro presidencies, the thesis will utilize the OAS as a mechanism for measuring shifts in the balance of U.S. influence in Latin America. To do this, it will once again compare and contrast documents produced within the OAS over the previously stated 14-year period. Documents to be analyzed will include statements from the Summits of the Americas, resolutions and declarations, as well as any significant changes to guiding OAS documents such as the Inter-American Democratic Charter. As changes occur and priorities shift within the OAS, the thesis will search for links to U.S. foreign policy decisions.

F. THESIS OVERVIEW

The late Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez was viewed by some as an irrational, eccentric, and inconsistent head of state; it is hard to envision a similar individual leading the United States. Yet when one looks at the details, the picture becomes much more difficult to comprehend in a single glance. Prior to his death, Chávez led what he termed a “Bolivarian Revolution” throughout Latin America. One of his main missions was to decrease U.S. influence, but was he successful? This thesis strives to answer that question by specifically analyzing the role of the United States within the OAS and how that role changed between 2000 and 2014 as a result of its foreign policies toward Venezuela. It will begin with a brief background of Chávez and Venezuelan politics followed by a thorough review of significant moments in Venezuela’s domestic situation between 2000 and 2014. The focus will then shift in Chapter III to the United States as the proposal attempts to find consistency within U.S. foreign policy as it relates to Venezuela. Chapter IV observes the regional institution of the OAS and how it has changed since its inception in an effort to identify shifts in influence. The thesis will conclude with the argument that the United States has lost influence within Latin America, measured by its decreased influence within the OAS, as a result of its foreign policy toward Venezuela.

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II. VENEZUELA'S BOLIVARIAN REVOLUTION

A. INTRODUCTION

In the early 1800s, South America saw the emergence of a man who would go on to become a symbol for an entire region: Simón Bolívar. The importance of Bolívar was instantly apparent, when in 1825 the Peruvian politician José Domingo Choquehuana told Bolívar, “You are the man of destiny. Nothing that has happened in the past bears any resemblance to your accomplishments. To imitate you, it would be necessary once again to liberate a world.”²⁵ Despite such aspirations for a new age of hope and prosperity for all of Latin America, the region experienced substantial variation within and across countries for the next 175 years. In 1998, invoking Bolívar’s vision of anti-imperialism and Latin American unity, the leader of what would come to be known as the Bolivarian Revolution, Hugo Chávez Frías, was elected president of Venezuela.²⁶ To properly understand the role of the United States in Latin America in the 2000s, one must also understand Venezuela under Chávez and the effects his movement had on the region. This chapter will analyze Chávez’s impact on Latin America by first providing background on the political context in which Chávez made his transition from soldier to politician. It will then highlight key moments in his Bolivarian Revolution and what they meant to the region. It will conclude with Chávez’s death and what current Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro does or does not mean in terms of carrying on the legacy. In pursuit of their Bolivarian Revolution, both Chávez and Maduro created domestic and regional institutions that would serve as challenges for U.S. foreign policy for more than a decade.

²⁵ Richard Gott, *In the Shadow of the Liberator: Hugo Chávez and the Transformation of Venezuela* (New York: Verso, 2000), 97.

²⁶ Margarita López Maya, “Hugo Chávez Frías: His Movement and His Presidency,” in *Venezuelan Politics in the Chávez Era: Class, Polarization & Conflict*, eds. Steve Ellner and Daniel Hellinger (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2003), 84–85.

B. CHÁVEZ'S POLITICAL RISE IN CONTEXT

Chávez's political rise took part thanks to a series of events dating back some 50 years. Beginning in 1948, Venezuela transitioned from a democracy to a military dictatorship, with General Marcos Pérez Jiménez emerging as its leader in 1952. First on the agenda for Pérez Jiménez was to outlaw the previous political parties and open up the Venezuelan market, particularly with his Reciprocal Trade Treaty of 1952 with the United States. For the next six years, Pérez Jiménez boosted state ownership of commodities and attempted to construct a strong national identity within Venezuela, all under incredibly repressive rule. It was the suppression of the citizens that ultimately united the four opposition parties into the Patriotic Junta in 1957. In what was a rarity for Latin America at the time, the Junta combined both communist and democratic parties in an effective manner, as evidenced by their abstention of Pérez Jiménez's plebiscite for continued rule in December 1957. The opposition grew strong enough that it was able to force Pérez Jiménez to flee the country, leaving his six-year mark as a dictator that favored foreign interests over those of his fellow Venezuelans.²⁷

With the reestablishment of democracy in 1958, Venezuela saw the creation of a system that would remain in control until Chávez's election as president. One of the most significant aspects of the new regime was the Punto Fijo Pact, which excluded the communist party and solidified COPEI, AD, and the Democratic Republican Union (URD) as the three parties that would govern Venezuela. In addition to formalizing the three parties as the official parties of Venezuela, the Pact also created a mutual agreement for a coalition government, regardless of who won the presidency. Conscious of indicators that may have led to tension in the past, the Pact also included top leaders in the church, business, and military. As the democracy developed, its first president, Rómulo Betancourt, settled into a foreign policy that emulated that of the United States thanks to its anti-communist leanings. Among other actions taken by the Venezuelan government against Cuba, Betancourt joined the United States in an effort to expel Cuba from the OAS in 1962 because of its non-democratic government. Regarding labor

²⁷ Steve Ellner, *Rethinking Venezuelan Politics: Class, Conflict, and the Chávez Phenomenon* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2008), 46–49.

unions and the right to mobilize, Betancourt cracked down, limiting the size of and time for strikes and protests.²⁸

For the next 20 years, Venezuelan politics mostly followed down the same path. In the early 1970s, however, Carlos Andrés Pérez of the AD became president and moved toward a greater state presence in the economy. Perhaps his most important action was the nationalization of two of Venezuela's most important industries: oil and steel. Pérez's intervention in the economy mirrored similar efforts in his foreign policy and social development as he moved toward what he hoped would be a form of socialism, calling to mind many aspects of the government of Juan Domingo Perón in Argentina in the 1930s and 1940s.²⁹ By the 1980s, however, declining oil prices and the subsequent economic crisis brought significant difficulties for Venezuelan politicians. President Luis Herrera Campins of COPEI recognized an upcoming downfall in the early 1980s and attempted to reverse Pérez's economic intervention policies. By cutting back government spending and modifying the exchange rate, Campins hoped to slow down growth and reduce inflation. By ignoring Venezuela's reliance on foreign financial institutions, however, the country ventured further into debt. The following president brought more of the same as Venezuela seemed unable to recover from the crisis.³⁰

Hoping to provide the much-needed solution, new president Carlos Andrés Pérez of the AD set about enacting neoliberal reforms almost immediately following his election in 1989. His efforts had drastic unforeseen consequences and on February 27, 1989, two days of mass looting was responded to with military force in what came to be known as the *Caracazo*. While Pérez pushed forward with the reforms, the informal economy increased and the political power of organized labor decreased. The popular social discontent in Venezuela helped lead Chávez to a coup attempt in 1992, discussed below. Even after a similar coup attempt in November 1992 by the Air Force, Pérez was able to retain power. In an effort to show his ability to be flexible and support the public, he made several appointments of independents outside of the AD. As disillusion grew

²⁸ Ellner, *Rethinking Venezuelan Politics*, 59, 62–63.

²⁹ Ibid., 71–73.

³⁰ Ibid., 79.

between Pérez and his own political party, so, too, did the people grow disillusioned with both the AD and COPEI.³¹ By the time the 1998 election came around, both the AD and COPEI were near collapse and the situation was ripe for someone like Chávez to come around and win the popular vote.

C. CHÁVEZ THE SOLDIER

Hugo Chávez Frías was born on July 28, 1954, to a family with a long tradition of taking seriously education, military, and politics. His father, Hugo de los Reyes Chávez, was a teacher, member of the Christian Democratic Party (COPEI), and beginning in November 1998, governor of the state of Barinas. His brother, Adán Chávez, was a university professor in Mérida and member of the Constituent Assembly in 1999, and is the current governor of Barinas (2008–present). Military tradition dates back to Chávez senior’s great-grandfather, Colonel Pedro Pérez Pérez, who fought as a guerrilla in the Sovereign Army of the People against the Venezuelan oligarchy in the 1840s. Colonel Pérez’s son–Hugo Chávez’s great grandfather–was General Pedro Pérez Delgado, also known as Maisanta. In his youth, Chávez was told stories by his grandmother about how Maisanta was nothing more than a murderer and a criminal. However, as Chávez aged, he began to interpret Maisanta’s rebellion against an oppressive military dictatorship in 1914 as the work of a freedom fighter, much like the efforts of Bolívar.³²

Chávez’s upbringing and love of history heavily influenced him, and in 1971, he enrolled in the Venezuelan army. He was introduced to the idea of blending politics and military early on, with one highlight being a 1974 visit to Peru for the 150th anniversary of the Battle of Ayacucho. The trip not only commemorated Bolívar’s liberation of Peru, but also gave Chávez a glimpse into the regime of General Juan Velasco Alvarado, a Peruvian military officer that had taken power in 1968. Velasco had become a unique military leader in the region, establishing progressive reforms and redistributing wealth within his country while other military regimes were more focused on consolidating power. Chávez’s first years in the army were spent in a counterinsurgency battalion in

³¹ Ellner, *Rethinking Venezuelan Politics*, 90-96.

³² Gott, *Shadow of the Liberator*, 36–37.

Barinas combatting members of the insurgent group Red Flag. During his time in Barinas, he began to empathize with the guerrillas who fought against a military they viewed as corrupt, under the direction of corrupt politicians. The experience ultimately led Chávez to form in 1977 a group within the army, the Liberation Army of the Venezuelan People (ELPV), as a potential solution to the corruption he had witnessed. Early on, he became friends with Jesús Urdaneta Hernández, a fellow officer that supported Chávez's ideals of a movement within the army. In 1982, after years of economic downfall and an increase in poverty following the 1973 oil boom, Chávez chose a military solution for the political problem and created within the army the Bolivarian Revolutionary Movement 200 (MBR-200), named in honor of Bolívar's 200th birthday. Chávez, Urdaneta, and Felipe Acosta Carles, all lecturers at the military academy at the time, swore to uphold the goals of Bolívar and to fight until the oppressed had been liberated.³³

The next ten years saw the development of the MBR-200 and further disillusionment of the military with the government. As civil-military relations decreased and the military grew tired of an increased role in internal security, then Colonel Chávez chose to intervene and the MBR-200 attempted a military coup d'état on February 4, 1992.³⁴ One of the key additions to the movement was Francisco Javier Arias Cárdenas, who joined in March 1985. Although he did not have the same charming personality that Chávez had, Cárdenas would come to serve as one of the movement's leading intellectuals.³⁵ By the time the coup was set to take place, Chávez, Urdaneta, and Arias Cárdenas were all in charge of regiments. Although a solid plan appeared to be in place, the coup attempt ultimately failed. The reasons for failure are many, but include lack of civilian support, a betrayal from within the movement that gave the military an early warning, and only sporadic success throughout the country.³⁶ Deciding to abandon the coup, Chávez requested to speak on television to disseminate the message to his fellow

³³ Gott, *Shadow of the Liberator*, 37–40.

³⁴ Harold Trinkunas, "The Crisis in Venezuelan Civil-Military Relations: From Punto Fijo to the Fifth Republic," *Latin American Research Review* 37, no. 1 (2002): 48–49.

³⁵ Ibid., 41.

³⁶ Ibid., 66–70.

commanders. His appearance not only gave the movement a face, it also gave a message of hope to the people of Venezuela:

First I want to say “good morning” to all the people of Venezuela, but this Bolivarian message is directed specifically to the courageous soldiers of the parachute regiment of Aragua and the tank regiment of Valencia.

Comrades: unfortunately, for the moment, the objectives that we had set ourselves have not been achieved in the capital. That’s to say that those of us here in Caracas have not been able to seize power. Where you are, you have performed well, but now is the time for a rethink; new possibilities will arise again and the country will be able to move definitively toward a better future.

So listen to what I have to say, listen to comandante Chávez who is sending you this message, and, please, think deeply. Lay down your arms, for in truth the objectives that we set ourselves at a national level are not within our grasp.

Comrades, listen to this message of solidarity. I am grateful for your loyalty, for your courage, and for your selfless generosity; before the country and before you, I alone shoulder the responsibility for this Bolivarian military uprising. Thank you.³⁷

As can be expected, Chávez received a long prison term for his role in leading the coup attempt. That said, he only served just over two years, February 1992 to March 1994, and immediately following the coup, President Rafael Caldera chose to address the underlying causes of the attempt rather than to denounce: “A military coup, whatever form it takes, must be censured and condemned; yet it would be naïve to think this was an event in which a handful of ambitious men threw themselves rashly into an adventure, on their account, without being aware of the wider implications of their action. There was a set of circumstances here, a backcloth to these developments, which is the serious situation in which the country finds itself. If this situation is not dealt with, the future may yet hold unpleasant surprises for us all.”³⁸

Chávez used his time in prison to develop his ideology and to take advantage of an evolving political situation in the country. Through radio interviews and prison visits,

³⁷ Gott, *Shadow of the Liberator*, 70–71.

³⁸ Ibid., 72–73.

he distributed a message of social equality and democracy while concurrently building political affiliations with emerging parties. Meanwhile, the traditional ruling parties of Venezuela, Democratic Action (AD) and COPEI, were in decline with new, left-leaning parties such as La Causa R and Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) gaining popular support.³⁹ After his release from prison, Chávez continued to travel and make political allies until, in April 1997, he formally made the shift from soldier to politician, announcing his intention to run for president in the 1998 elections. Maintaining much of the structure of MBR-200, he created the formal political party of the Fifth Republic Movement (MVR) in July 1997. Alluding as always to the ideals of Bolívar, the Fifth Republic would aspire to be the place Bolívar had dreamed about and would stand as the first fresh start to democracy in 140 years. Chávez's personality was critical during his campaign, and many parties began to jump on the Chávez bandwagon. The first major show of support came from the Fatherland for Everyone (PPT) party, a branch of La Causa R, and was shortly followed by MAS. The strength of PPT and MAS combined with the MVR gave Chávez the support he needed, and in December 1998, he received 56.20 percent of the votes, enough to win the election.⁴⁰

D. MVR PUSHES FOR CHANGE

Having finally achieved victory, it was time for Chávez to deliver on his promises. Venezuela was among the first Latin American states to democratize, making the transition in 1958, but for Chávez and the members of the MVR, simply carrying the title of *democracy* was not enough. Social unrest had grown significantly in the 1980s and 1990s throughout Venezuela thanks to numerous coup attempts, a growing poverty level, and natural oil revenue going to the elites. The country was ready for a change and Chávez's allusions to a Bolivarian Revolution seemed to ring true with much of the populace, particularly the poor. From the outset Chávez outlined a plan to rewrite the constitution of 1961 and to use the armed forces as a source for social good, not just for

³⁹ Gott, *Shadow of the Liberator*, 130-32; Michael Coppedge, "Venezuela: Popular Sovereignty Versus Liberal Democracy," in *Constructing Democratic Governance in Latin America*, 2nd ed., ed. Jorge I. Domínguez and Michael Shifter (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 171-75.

⁴⁰ Gott, *Shadow of the Liberator*, 144-48.

the standard national defense strategy of an army. To implement his plan, however, he needed to legislative support so he held elections for a National Constituent Assembly in July 1999. Not surprisingly, given the affiliations he had built throughout his campaign and the support the MVR had from the masses, Chávez supporters were elected to 119 out of 131 seats in the Assembly. Choosing not to completely dissolve the previous government structure, Chávez and the Assembly also had to determine the role of the old Congress, made up of a senate and a chamber of deputies. After an initial period of disagreement, the Congress agreed not to include any provisions in the new constitution that would give it the ability to restrict the Assembly.⁴¹

With legislative affairs reformed, Chávez and the Assembly then moved their attention to the judiciary. Upon taking office, corruption was rampant in the judicial system, and some 23,000 citizens were in prison without ever receiving a trial.⁴² To correct the problem, the government established a Judicial Nominations Committee that would review the candidates for Supreme Court judges before passing the list to the Citizen Power for consideration. Under the new constitution, the Citizen Power would be made up of the attorney general, comptroller, and public defender. The Citizen Power would then shorten the list, which would be forwarded to the Assembly for final approval. The process was designed with layers to prevent selection of judges through corrupt officials or bribes. The reforms as detailed in the new constitution did not necessarily come together as planned, with less participatory democracy and more power in the Assembly, as it elected both the Citizen Power and the judges.⁴³

Throughout the reform process, Chávez continually stressed the role of the people in the government, both in rhetoric and practice. As a symbol of the faith the government purportedly held in the citizens, the new constitution also included a system of referendums that would allow for the removal of elected officials with sufficient votes. The so-called “constituent-power” would be more powerful than any other branch of

⁴¹ Gott, *Shadow of the Liberator*, 153–59.

⁴² Ibid., 160–63.

⁴³ Angel E. Alvarez, “State Reform Before and After Chávez’s Election,” in *Venezuelan Politics in the Chávez Era: Class, Polarization & Conflict*, eds. Steve Ellner and Daniel Hellinger (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003), 151–53.

government. Although the people were given more power in the government, Chávez also gave more power to himself as the executive. Whereas the people could only call an assembly for a referendum and potential recall of an elected official with at least 20 percent of the registered voters, Chávez could call a constituent assembly with a decree in the Council of Ministers.⁴⁴ This gave Chávez the ability to challenge the authority of any elected official while challenging his authority would be much more difficult.

Chávez had not forgotten the military in his initiative to change Venezuela and created what was known as Plan Bolívar 2000. Deploying troops for social causes, he battled problems such as sanitation, health, public transport, and housing. The plan was designed to both solve domestic problems while also shining a positive light on a military that was known for repression. Unfortunately for Chávez, the move caused dissent among the ranks as some soldiers felt they were being used for a mission outside of their training. Making matters more difficult, Chávez's decentralization campaign also created problems for civil-military relations as military officers now found themselves directly responsible for the budgets that were to be used for social development, as opposed to acting under the guidance of a mayor or governor as was the case previously.⁴⁵ These same problems would arise again in 2002 and serve as a catalyzing force in the coup attempt against Chavez.

By the year 2000, Chávez had put in place many of the reforms he had planned, but the intended outcomes of the reforms were yet to be achieved, and opposition was on the rise. Polarization between political parties grew as differences that were put aside to either support or oppose Chávez in the 1998 election became more evident. Even some supporters of Chávez doubted his legitimacy as he continued to put forth anti-neoliberal rhetoric while often supporting the open global market. For example, he openly opposed the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) agreement in 2001 and yet did not break

44 Alvarez, "State Reform," 154–55.

45 Daniel Hellinger, "Political Overview: The Breakdown in Puntofijismo and the Rise of Chavismo," in *Venezuelan Politics in the Chávez Era: Class, Polarization & Conflict*, eds. Steve Ellner and Daniel Hellinger (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003), 44; Harold Trinkunas, "The Transformation of the Bolivarian Armed Force: Venezuela," in *The Routledge Handbook of Civil-Military Relations*, eds. Thomas C. Bruneau and Florina Cristiana Matei (Routledge, 2012), 126–28.

Venezuela's economic ties with the United States. Recognizing the need to demonstrate follow-through on his rhetoric, Chávez embarked on significant economic reforms in November 2001. The package of 49 laws would try in earnest to break free from the neoliberalism of the 1990s. Including such items as land reform, new fishing laws, state-controlled social security, and government ownership of oil, he hoped to decrease the power of private corporations and increase the power of the state. Using an emergency authority, Chávez passed the reforms without the approval of the Assembly.⁴⁶

E. THE COUP OF 2002 AND CHÁVEZ'S RESPONSE

The massive reforms validated one of Chávez's key campaign points from 1998 of breaking free from neoliberalism, but they also served as the tipping point for intense polarization resulting in a 2002 coup that briefly removed him from office. Where certain sectors within MAS and MVR were willing to put up with Chávez's reforms in 1998 through 2000, the reforms in 2001 seemed to give Chávez unchecked power. Those who shifted away from Chávez included his old friend and partner Francisco Arias Cárdenas, who at the time was heading the Union Party.⁴⁷ It seemed as though the situation would soon be untenable, and in a March 2002 CRS report, the staff wrote that, "critics and other observers have raised concerns about his (Chávez) government and fear that the President is moving toward authoritarian rule with his domination of most government institutions."⁴⁸ The same report also identified that Chávez's powerful opposition, mostly consisting of political parties, unions, and business leaders, was further separating itself from Chávez and his supporters, who at this time consisted of several different political parties, unions, business leaders, and the poor.⁴⁹ At the forefront of the powerful opposition were the Venezuelan Federation of Chambers and Associations of Commerce and Production (FEDECAMARAS), headed by Pedro Carmona, and the

⁴⁶ Ellner, *Rethinking Venezuelan Politics*, 110-13.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 113-14.

⁴⁸ K. Larry Storrs et al., *Latin America and the Caribbean: Legislative Issues in 2001-2002* (CRS Report No. RL30971) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, March 6, 2002), 19.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 19.

Venezuelan Workers' Confederation (CTV), led by Carlos Ortega.⁵⁰ Following a successful strike in early 2002 through which oil workers earned higher pay, the opposition sensed weakness in the Chávez regime. CTV, backed by FEDECAMARAS, ordered several more strikes in April of the same year. The strikes proved only minimally successful and the opposition moved for mass demonstrations. Luckily for the opposition, they also had an ally in the media as the major television corporations within Venezuela were led by elites who opposed Chávez. What began as a well-coordinated mass demonstration at the headquarters of Petroleum of Venezuela, Joint Stock Company (PDVSA)—one of the leading oil companies—became a large-scale march on the presidential palace. The opposition, in a calculated plan, had garnered enough popular support in the streets to challenge Chávez's presidency.⁵¹ On April 11, 2002, the military forcefully removed Chávez from office.

One immediate trigger for the coup was the turn of the demonstrations from peaceful to violent. It is hard to say what instigated what, but at a certain point during the march on the presidential palace shots were exchanged between Chávez supporters and the opposition. By the end of the day, dozens were dead and up to 100 were wounded. To stop the crisis, the opposition demanded the resignation of Chávez. The opposition owned much of the non-state media in Venezuela and used it to show mostly images of violent assaults by the Chávez regime against peaceful protesters.⁵² Perhaps one of the best glimpses of what was really happening during the coup attempt is the film *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*. Although the film is biased toward Chávez, it does provide a glimpse into the confusion and shock within the Chávez regime and the presidential palace during the coup. Of particular interest is the ease at which the high command of the military was willing to go along with the coup and move Chávez to a detention facility.⁵³ The man that had built his career as a revolutionary military officer and coup leader was now seeing events unfold from the other side.

⁵⁰ Ellner, *Rethinking Venezuelan Politics*, 114–15.

⁵¹ Ellner, *Rethinking Venezuelan Politics*, 114–115; Hellinger, "Political Overview," 50–51.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*, directed by Kim Bartley and Donnacha O'Briain (2003; Ireland: Power Pictures, 2003), DVD.

Almost just as quickly as he had been removed, Chávez was returned to power, on April 13. Such a quick change can partially be attributed to the actions by the interim regime, headed by Pedro Carmona, the president of FEDECAMARAS. In what appeared to be a deliberate plan to return Venezuela to its pre-Chávez state, Carmona appointed to key positions several individuals from the Rafael Caldera regime, the government preceding Chávez. Carmona took several actions to remain in power. For example, he gave two important defense positions—including the post of Defense Minister—to the navy and not the army in hopes of breaking up support for Chávez and for army general Efraín Vásquez Velasco, one of the coup leaders. Further distancing himself from representatives of the Chávez government, Carmona appointed a right-wing Opus Dei foreign minister and refused to meet with Congress. Using the deaths on April 11th as a justification to charge Chávez and many of his supporters, and having restructured the government in one day, Carmona was on pace to enact his plan to steer the country toward neoliberal reforms. Unfortunately for Carmona, his inability to garner support from the people, refusal to incorporate the same army leaders that helped in the coup, and his aggressive reforms proved to be too much, and on April 13, the military and the citizens of Venezuela brought Chávez back to power.⁵⁴

The U.S. government also had a role in the coup. By late 2001, relations between the United States and Venezuela had soured. Chávez had denounced the U.S. bombings of Afghanistan (which themselves were in response to the September 11, 2001, bombings of the World Trade Center). Amid polarization in Venezuela, U.S. officials and the government-financed National Endowment for Democracy (NED) met with opposition leaders. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in particular knew that the opposition was attempting to exploit unrest as a justification for arresting Chávez. There was also a significant change in NED funding between 2000 and 2001 as Venezuela rose to become the fifth largest recipient in the region. Much of these funds were allotted to the same opposition groups that marched against Chávez and supported Carmona in 2002. In the aftermath of the coup, Chávez alleged that U.S. military ships that had been stationed off

⁵⁴ Ellner, *Rethinking Venezuelan Politics*, 117-19.

the coast of Venezuela during the crisis were there for the purpose of providing information to the opposition.⁵⁵

The U.S. government was quick to recognize Carmona's government as legitimate.⁵⁶ Just one day after Chávez's removal from office, the U.S. Department of State released an official press statement blaming the changeover in government on the Chávez government's suppression of peaceful demonstrations and claiming that Chávez had dismissed the Vice President and his Cabinet and had resigned.⁵⁷ The U.S. government stood alone in its position. Several foreign ministers who had been on scene at the presidential palace during the coup stated at the time that Chávez was not resigning and that he was being forcibly removed by a coup. Chávez himself said, "we're not gone yet," as he was being escorted away by the military to a detention center.⁵⁸ While there is not yet clear evidence that the U.S. government was behind the 2002 coup plot, the groups that the United States funded prior to the coup and its recognition of the Carmona regime would go on to embolden Chávez in his anti-U.S. imperialism messaging once he returned to power, as explored further in the next chapter.

Back in power, to strengthen his position, Chávez almost immediately created the Presidential Commission for a National Dialogue, which brought together members of the opposition and government in an effort to reduce tensions. He also implemented the decentralization plan from the 1999 Constitution and reinstated seven key executives for multiple oil companies that he had fired just before the coup. Despite his efforts, Chávez did not win over the opposition, which had garnered enough support to challenge Chávez in a recall election. When the vote was held on August 15, 2004, 59 percent of the voters favored Chávez remaining in office. Though international organizations such as the Carter Center and the Organization of American States deemed the election fair, the opposition claimed fraud based on a report from *Súmate*, a non-governmental

⁵⁵ This allegation has not been validated by the U.S. government.

⁵⁶ Ellner, *Rethinking Venezuelan Politics*, 198–99.

⁵⁷ U.S. Department of State, *Venezuela: Change of Government*, by Philip T. Reeker (Washington, DC: April 12, 2002).

⁵⁸ *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*.

organization headed by María Corina Machado. Machado and *Súmate*, one of the principal recipients of the U.S. NED funds, were both discredited by Chávez as U.S. tools of influence. In the meantime, much of the opposition refused to vote in the October 31, 2004, mayoral-gubernatorial elections due to the impression that there would be fraud and retribution from Chavez. As a result, Chávez supporters won in all but two states. Having at least attempted to provide concessions to the opposition, won more legitimacy in the recall vote, and secured support nation-wide in the October elections, Chávez was now free to push forward with more radical reforms.⁵⁹

F. CHÁVEZ CONSOLIDATES POWER

The next decade of rule under Chávez saw unprecedented developments in what is now known as the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. Following a similar strategy as was used in the October 2004 elections, the opposition boycotted the December 2005 congressional elections. Although the move did bring negative international attention to Chávez, it also gave him absolute control of the National Assembly. Already having declared Venezuela as anti-imperialist in 2004, he could now strengthen what he called “socialism for the 21st century.” Eight primary tenets of this new form of politics were social missions, worker cooperatives, co-management, government expropriation, land distribution, strict tax enforcement, delegation of authority to community organizations, and rejection of links to organized business interests. Chávez’s hope was to improve social welfare and to use popular support to increase his control. The new plan also gave Chávez an opportunity to deny U.S. influence in the country, while promoting his economic policies in South America. Through deepened ties with Cuba, he brought thousands of Cuban doctors and educators to countries in the region to perform services for the poor.⁶⁰

Consolidating power not only meant improving popular support. It also meant further weakening powerful institutions within Venezuela. To do so, Chávez began to redistribute land from major foreign landowners as well as expropriating industries that

⁵⁹ Ellner, *Rethinking Venezuelan Politics*, 118–21.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 121–125.

the government deemed mismanaged. By strictly enforcing tax laws, particularly on foreign investors, he was also able to seize assets from major international companies such as General Motors and Hewlett-Packard.

Having increased state control, decreased foreign influence within Venezuela, and brought services to his people, an emboldened Chávez won reelection in December 2006. The government then began to encroach on public sectors, buying controlling shares of major telephone and electricity companies CANTV and Caracas Electricity. He similarly strengthened PDVSA's dominance in the oil sector, transferring employees of major mixed ownership companies under the state's payroll. The changes also occurred within the government as Chávez consolidated multiple supporter groups into one singular party, the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV).⁶¹

Perhaps Chávez's most drastic proposed changes came in the form of a 2007 constitutional referendum. In August 2007, the president announced a constitutional reform that would change 33 of the 350 articles of the Venezuelan resolution. According to Chávez, the changes would help him increase the redistribution of wealth to the poor and give more political power to Venezuelans. After the National Assembly came to a conclusion regarding the proposals, the amendments and 69 final reforms were split into two separate voting blocks, to be voted on in a public referendum on December 2, 2007. Included in the final reforms was an amendment that would extend the presidential term from six to seven years and that would abolish the presidential two-term limit. After a previous five years of increasing popular support of Chávez, one would have expected both blocks of the referendum to pass. Instead, both failed, with a mere 50.65 percent voting "no" for Block A and 51.01 percent rejecting Block B. One possible explanation for the loss is that only 56 percent of the electorate voted, as opposed to the 75 percent that voted in the December 2006 presidential election. Another potential explanation is that the reforms were too radical, even for a population that had largely welcomed the changes Chávez brought to Venezuela. It was viewed as Chávez's first true democratic

61 Ellner, *Rethinking Venezuelan Politics*, 124–128.

defeat, but he would pass through several of the reforms he deemed most important by presidential decree months later.⁶²

In 2008, Chávez continued on an unprecedented strategy of expropriating corporations. His control of major basic industry sectors served not only as a means of controlling the state economy, but also as a punishment for opposition investors. By constantly attacking opposition leaders, Chávez needed the support of the people to remain in control and he continued to push for social development and what appeared to be decentralized government. Through the promotion of labor unions and the development of community councils, the common poor laborer still had reason to believe that Chávez was acting in their best interest.⁶³ His efforts worked and on February 15, 2009, and with a 70 percent voter turnout, the two-term limit for presidency was revoked, meaning Chávez could run again for office in 2012.⁶⁴

G. INTERNATIONAL INFLUENCE

Following the 2002 coup, Chávez not only consolidated his power domestically, he also developed his reputation among other Latin America leaders for opposing U.S. influence in the region. Recognizing reduced support in the region for the United States after the latter's invasion of Iraq in 2003, Chávez immediately began denouncing U.S. imperialism. Prior to that point, Chávez often steered away from publicly denouncing the United States and instead promoted the idea of a multi-polar world, but after implications of U.S. support for the 2002 coup and an invasion into the Middle East, a region where Chávez had many allies, he changed his stance. First on Chávez's list was an extension of his petro-diplomacy, based on Venezuela's massive amounts of crude oil. In June 2005, Chávez signed an agreement with 13 Caribbean countries, including Cuba, to create PetroCaribe, a discounted oil pact. The deal greatly increased Venezuela's presence in the region, creating not only economic stimulation, but also favoritism from national leaders

⁶² Mark P. Sullivan, *Venezuela's December 2, 2007 Constitutional Referendum* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, December 18, 2007), 1–7.

⁶³ Steve Ellner, "Social and Political Diversity and the Democratic Road to Change in Venezuela," *Latin American Perspectives* 40, no. 3 (2013): 67–69, 71–74.

⁶⁴ Mark P. Sullivan, *Venezuela: Political Conditions and U.S. Policy* (CRS Report No. RL32488) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, July 28, 2009), 21–26.

that benefitted from the cheap oil. Utilizing the now more powerful state-owned PDVSA, Chávez also sought out development projects abroad, creating plans for refineries and gas lines in other countries, including Cuba, Brazil, and Argentina. Similar intentions led to the creation of PetroSur as well, the South American version of PetroCaribe.⁶⁵

Oil was not the only arena in which Chávez sought influence in the region. Part of Chávez's Bolivarian Revolution also consisted of attempting to unite and integrate all of Latin America.⁶⁶ Rather than working through the OAS, what Chávez viewed as a tool of the United States, he created the Bolivarian Alternative for America (ALBA). Launched initially in 2005, ALBA was a pact between Venezuela and Cuba that included some 49 trade and cooperation agreements as well as educational exchanges. In 2006, and perhaps as a result of PetroCaribe and PetroSur, Ecuador and several Caribbean states joined in. ALBA also served as a direct challenge to the U.S. FTAA and the World Bank, going against the standard neoliberal economic strategy. ALBA extended into non-economic sectors as well, addressing issues such as immigration and national sovereignty.⁶⁷

Recognizing that he was not alone in his quest to oppose the United States, Chávez also teamed up with MERCOSUR. In particular, MERCOSUR and Chávez were united in their desires to oppose the FTAA. In 2005, anti-American moves were perhaps at their high point as Chávez found himself surrounded by leftist Latin American leaders such as Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in Brazil and Néstor Kirchner in Argentina. Although Venezuela was not officially part of MERCOSUR until 2012, Chávez carried significant pull among his peers and was able to garner support in his efforts against the FTAA. The plan came to a head at the Fourth Summit of the Americas in November 2005 when Venezuela and the MERCOSUR members denied U.S. President Bush's attempts at renegotiating over the FTAA.

⁶⁵ Ellner, *Rethinking Venezuelan Politics*, 202–205.

⁶⁶ See Chapter IV for further discussion on the OAS.

⁶⁷ Ellner, *Rethinking Venezuelan Politics*, 202–205.

Although Chávez did have allies across the region, he also had enemies. He verbally attacked Mexican President Vicente Fox and Peruvian President Alan García on multiple occasions. At the same Summit of the Americas meeting in 2005, Chávez called Fox a “puppy dog of the U.S. empire.” Similarly, Chávez played a heavy role in Peru’s June 2006 runoff election. Presidential candidate Alan García had come to a runoff election with leftist candidate Ollanta Humala. García accused Chávez of imposing his candidate on the people of Peru, to which Chávez called García a bandit.⁶⁸

H. VENEZUELA POST-CHÁVEZ

After winning reelection in 2006 and the vote to lift term limits in 2009, President Chávez was reelected in 2012. Due to an ongoing battle with cancer, Chávez’s run was finally cut short. He died on March 5, 2013.⁶⁹ He left serious challenges for future Venezuelan governments. From 2010 until the present, the country has seen economic contraction resulting from a drop in oil prices, high inflation from the ever-high state spending, and significant capital flight due to investor doubt in the Venezuelan economy.⁷⁰ Other legacies that have been criticized by the United States and members of the international community such as the UN include human rights violations, threats to freedom of expression, and a weak stance toward intercepting illegal drug trafficking along Venezuela’s 1,370-mile border with Colombia.⁷¹ While Chávez was able to downplay many of these issues, the same cannot be said for his handpicked replacement, President Nicolás Maduro. Maduro, a former legislator from 1998 to 2006, National Assembly president from 2005 to 2006, and foreign minister from 2006 until 2012, was inaugurated on October 13, 2012. According to the Venezuelan Constitution, the vice president would become president in the absence of Chávez until a new election could take place. Chávez was set to be inaugurated on January 10, 2013, even in his poor

⁶⁸ Ellner, *Rethinking Venezuelan Politics*, 209–211.

⁶⁹ Mark P. Sullivan, *Venezuela: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. R43239) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, April 11, 2014), 4–8.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 17–19.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 26–33.

health, but on January 8, Maduro announced that the swearing in would have to be postponed until a later date. Maduro was formally elected president on April 13, 2013.⁷²

Polarization continued to grow within Venezuela as the Democratic Unity Roundtable (MUD) and even members within the Maduro's United Socialist Party (PSUV) itself began to distance themselves from Maduro. There were talks of a rivalry between Maduro and National Assembly President Diosdado Cabello, who carried the support of the military. Additionally, the economy began to shrink once again, with Venezuela now facing incredibly high inflation, an overvalued currency, and a rapidly depleting international reserve. In an attempt to solve some of his problems, Maduro removed multiple mid-level officials of the opposition from the National Assembly through accusations of corruption. Efforts to stop crime by using the military in May 2013 backfired and human rights groups chastised the plan as encouraging a military solution to a domestic problem.⁷³ The social and political challenges were not enough to prevent Maduro from receiving similar decree powers as Chávez, as determined by a three-fifths vote by the National Assembly in November 2013. Hopes of a sweep in the municipal elections were dashed on December 8 as the PSUV only won 242 of the 335 offices, losing to the MUD in two of the largest states and four of the five municipalities of Caracas.⁷⁴

Violence and economic problems continued to grow with civil unrest reaching a breaking point on January 7, 2014, following the murder former Miss Venezuela Monica Spear and her husband. What began as a peaceful student protest over crime in February turned violent when government security forces attacked the students. In the first protest, two students and a pro-government leader were killed. The outrage spurred more protests across Venezuela, this time encompassing many of the problems faced by civil society, including for example corruption and human rights violations. As of mid-April, at least 41 had been killed, more than 650 injured, and over 2,000 detained. Included in the

⁷² Mark P. Sullivan, *Venezuela: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. R43239) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, September 16, 2013), 7-11, 18.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 10-12.

⁷⁴ Mark P. Sullivan, *Venezuela: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. R43239) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, February 28, 2014), 9-11.

detentions was opposition leader Leopoldo López, a well-known MUD member. Recognizing an opportunity to create change, the MUD began to call for Maduro's resignation. Both the OAS and the Obama administration called for peaceful negotiations between Maduro and the opposition. Panama in particular asked for a special meeting of the OAS on February 27, leading to Maduro's suspension of diplomatic ties with Panama on March 5. The OAS finally met on March 7, but much to the dismay of the United States, the subsequent resolution highlighted the principle of non-intervention and supported Maduro. Only the United States, Panama, and Canada opposed the resolution. Just over two weeks later, on March 21, Panama once again raised the issue at the OAS, this time having made Venezuelan National Assembly member Maria Corina Machado a special member of its delegation. The OAS rejected Panama's request and Machado was stripped of her National Assembly position for her actions. The Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), a regional organization with a similar mission to that of the OAS, also met on March 12 and approved a resolution supporting Maduro. By April, UNASUR had begun to lead negotiations between Maduro and the opposition, using the church as an intermediary.⁷⁵

In his article *Venezuela Breaks Down in Violence*, Harold Trinkunas attributes the unrest primarily to Maduro's mismanagement of the economy.⁷⁶ Alongside economic failures, however, Venezuela is also a politically polarized state. For example, María Corina Machado, leader of *Súmate* and key player in the 2002 coup, is still at the helm of the protests. Considering her organization continues to be heavily funded by the U.S. government and that she has personally met with the White House regarding the current unrest, it would seem she still has an important role in the opposition against Maduro.⁷⁷ President Maduro himself recognizes the familiar foes in his April 1, 2014, piece for the *New York Times*:

⁷⁵ Mark P. Sullivan, *Venezuela: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. R43239) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, April 11, 2014), 11–16, 24–26.

⁷⁶ Harold Trinkunas, "Venezuela Breaks Down in Violence," Brookings Institution, uploaded January 23, 2014, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2014/01/venezuela-breaks-down-violence-trinkunas>.

⁷⁷ Sullivan, *Venezuela* (CRS Report No. R43239, April 11, 2014), 14–16.

In the United States, the protesters have been described as “peaceful,” while the Venezuelan government is said to be violently repressing them. According to this narrative, the American government is siding with the people of Venezuela; in reality, it is on the side of the 1 percent who wish to drag our country back to when the 99 percent were shut out of political life and only the few—including American companies—benefitted from Venezuela’s oil.

Let’s not forget that some of those who supported ousting Venezuela’s democratically elected government in 2002 are leading the protests today. Those involved in the 2002 coup immediately disbanded the Supreme Court and the legislature, and scrapped the Constitution. Those who incite violence and attempt similar unconstitutional actions today must face the justice system.⁷⁸

The similarities between modern day and the past are striking, not only if we consider the 2002 coup, but also with regard to the 1992 coup attempts. Further research should be conducted to compare the actions taken by both the regime and the opposition in each case. Chávez’s concessions to the opposition put them at bay for 12 years, but they did not completely solve the problem as a similar situation presents itself today.

Maduro is by no means Chávez. Although the policies of the two leaders are fairly similar, the difference in personality is damning for Maduro. Unfortunately for the United States, the damage has already been done. Thanks to the groundwork laid by Chávez, Maduro can refer to nearly any domestic problem as a result of the United States meddling in Venezuelan affairs. Opposition to the FTAA, emergence of groups like PetroCaribe and ALBA, and a more influential MERCOSUR can all partially be attributed to an effective policy campaign led by Chávez. As will be seen in the next chapter, the United States has often struggled with how to respond to the policies of a country where both action and inaction are viewed as negative external influence.

⁷⁸ Nicolás Maduro, “Venezuela: A Call for Peace,” The New York Times, April 1, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/02/opinion/Venezuela-a-call-for-peace.html?_r=0.

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III. U.S. FOREIGN POLICY AND VENEZUELA

A. INTRODUCTION

On February 3, 2006, then-U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld compared Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez Frías to Adolf Hitler, at a National Press Club appearance. Speaking about challenges faced by the United States in Latin America, Rumsfeld said, “I mean, we’ve got Chavez in Venezuela with a lot of oil money. He’s a person who was elected legally—just as Adolf Hitler was elected legally—and then consolidated power and now is, of course, working closely with Fidel Castro and Mr. Morales and others.”⁷⁹ Derogatory comments by state officials on both sides were surprisingly common at the time and in combination with ongoing strong economic relations between the two countries, are indicative of the complex relationship that exists between them. To better understand the impact of economic and diplomatic efforts by the United States toward Venezuela between 2000 and 2014 on U.S. influence in Latin America, this chapter will highlight key U.S. policy choices during the 14 years of interaction. As source material, the chapter considers more than 100 documents created in Washington over the time period, including Congressional Research Service (CRS) reports, posture statements from commanders of U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM), Director of National Intelligence reports, and many congressional testimonies. The chapter will present a chronological description of important events in the relationship up until April 2014, resulting both from bilateral and international developments, and how the United States responded. It will then conclude with the argument that the United States has pursued a primary strategy of continuing access to Venezuela’s natural resources with secondary goals of inhibiting terrorism, drug-trafficking, and human rights violations.

⁷⁹ Associated Press, “Rumsfeld Likens Venezuela’s Chávez to Hitler,” NBC News, February 3, 2006, http://www.nbcnews.com/id/11159503/ns/world_news-americas/t/rumsfeld-likens-venezuelas-chavez-hitler/#.VAs3DkvEbqs.

B. THE UNITED STATES MEETS CHÁVEZ

Prior to the election of Chávez in 1998, the United States had enjoyed close relations with Venezuela due to the latter's vast oil reserves. In 2001, Venezuela was still considered a key player in U.S. diplomacy in Latin America and was included in President George W. Bush's Andean Regional Initiative (ARI). Differing from the U.S.-Colombian Plan Colombia of the late 1990s–2000s, which focused primarily on military and counter-drug assistance, the ARI placed equal importance on economic and social programs in an effort to target not just coca crops and guerrillas, but also underlying developmental problems. In this program, Venezuela would receive \$10.5 million in FY2002. Additionally, Venezuela expressed interest in 2001 in joining the Andean Trade Preference Act (ATPA), implemented in 1991. The ATPA gave preferential treatment to certain U.S. imports in Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru.⁸⁰ At this point, even though the United States had some uncertainty regarding Chávez and his new constitution, mutual cooperation appeared to be possible. Toward the end of the year, however, Chávez became less favorable toward the United States as the latter embarked on an early military campaign in Afghanistan. In November 2001, The United States recalled its ambassador to Venezuela in response to disparaging remarks Chávez had made about U.S. government actions in the Middle East.⁸¹

In 2002, the relationship between the United States and Venezuela began to deteriorate, in large part due to the April 12th coup that temporarily ousted Chávez.⁸² The first official statement to come out of Washington regarding the incident was an April 12 press release by Philip T. Reeker, Deputy Spokesman for the Department of State. In the statement, Reeker claimed that the Chávez administration brought the situation upon itself through its undemocratic actions, and that Chávez had resigned.⁸³ These two points

⁸⁰ K. Larry Storrs et al., *Latin America and the Caribbean: Legislative Issues in 2001* (CRS Report No. RL30971) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, October 10, 2001), 11–12, 16.

⁸¹ K. Larry Storrs et al., *Latin America and the Caribbean: Legislative Issues in 2001-2002* (CRS Report No. RL30971) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, March 6, 2002), 19.

⁸² See Chapter II for more information regarding the coup.

⁸³ Philip T. Reeker, "Venezuela: Change of Government" (Washington, DC: Department of State Archive, April 12, 2002).

are important because they signify the beginning of a shift between the policies of the United States and those of the rest of Latin America. The vast majority of countries both in the region and around the world expressed solidarity with Chávez and specifically declared the event as an unlawful coup, not a resignation. The United States would ultimately shift its opinion slightly, siding with an Organization of American States (OAS) resolution that denounced the change of constitutional order.⁸⁴

By early 2003, an opposition-led general strike in Venezuela was hurting the country's oil exports, a concern for the United States, as some 14 percent of total U.S. oil imports in 2001 came from Venezuela. Chávez also strongly opposed any U.S. actions in Iraq on the grounds that they would violate both Iraq's sovereignty and international law. In response, Chávez began threatening to modify Venezuela's exports accordingly. Recognizing bilateral negotiations were unlikely to influence the Chávez regime, Bush looked toward the OAS. In addition to supporting OAS-led resolution meetings between Chávez and his domestic opposition that had been ongoing in Venezuela since October 2002, the United States also helped create the Friends of Venezuela, a coalition of some OAS members including the United States, Chile, Brazil, and Mexico, as well as Spain and Portugal, to facilitate negotiations between Chávez and his striking opposition.⁸⁵ The efforts proved fruitful; on February 18, Chávez and the opposition signed an OAS-facilitated Non-Violence Agreement. Nevertheless, the Chávez regime continued to arrest opposition leaders, a move that the Bush administration criticized. Consistently critical of Chávez, the United States also remained constant in its support for the OAS and the OAS' role in the negotiations.⁸⁶

The OAS continued to play an important role in Venezuelan affairs. In May 2003, Chávez agreed to a mid-term presidential recall referendum, which was ultimately held on August 15, 2004. Chávez won with 59.3 percent of the vote in what the OAS and

84 K. Larry Storrs et al., *Latin America and the Caribbean* (CRS Report No. RL30971, April 18, 2002), 22.

85 Mark P. Sullivan et al, *Latin America and the Caribbean: Issues for the 108th Congress* (CRS Report No. RL31726) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, January 30, 2003), 17; James Dao and Neela Banerjee, "Venezuela Crisis Complicates Iraq Situation, Experts Say," *New York Times*, January 11, 2003, <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/01/11/international/americas/11VENE.html>.

86 Mark P. Sullivan et al., *Latin America and the Caribbean: Issues for the 108th Congress* (CRS Report No. RL31726) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, February 28, 2003), 18.

Carter Center deemed a fair, legitimate vote. Once again, the Bush administration praised the OAS while also stressing that Chávez should include the opposition in future political decisions.⁸⁷ By this point, however, CRS reports identified what would become a difficult future with Chávez: “A dilemma for U.S. policymakers has been how to press the Chávez government to adhere to democratic principles without taking sides in Venezuela’s polarized political conflict.”⁸⁸ In the lead-up to the referendum, for example, Chávez declared that not only was the United States behind his 2002 ouster, but the United States was trying to govern Venezuela through the opposition vote in the referendum. Even though the U.S. Department of State’s Inspector General reviewed U.S. policy toward Venezuela and determined that the U.S. government was not involved in the coup, the anti-imperialism rhetoric helped Chávez win the vote and complicated U.S. policy options.⁸⁹

By the end of 2005, the United States-Venezuela relationship had taken a turn for the worst. Boasting an approval rating of 70 percent, Chávez allies won the majority of the gubernatorial and municipal positions in October 2004. In a move that backfired, the five major opposition parties sat out the December 4, 2005, elections for the National Assembly in hopes of attracting international attention to questionable practices by Chávez such as requiring fingerprinting to vote. The opposition expected the votes to be tracked and the Chávez government subsequently to detain opposition voters. Even though the OAS negotiated a deal to not use fingerprinting machines, the opposition still abstained, and Chávez supporters won all 167 seats of the National Assembly. An increase in world oil prices emboldened Chávez as the Venezuelan economy grew nearly 18 percent in 2004 and 9 percent in 2005. The extra revenue allowed Chávez to fully push for anti-poverty and social programs that made up a large part of his Bolivarian revolution.⁹⁰ With power across all branches of government and popular support, he

⁸⁷ Mark P. Sullivan et al., *Latin America and the Caribbean: Issues for the 108th Congress* (CRS Report No. RL31726) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, December 20, 2004), 37-38.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁸⁹ Mark P. Sullivan, *Venezuela: Political Conditions and U.S. Policy* (CRS Report No. RL32488) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, January 14, 2005), 7-8.

⁹⁰ Mark P. Sullivan, *Venezuela: Political Conditions and U.S. Policy* (CRS Report No. RL32488) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, January 17, 2006), 6-7, 9.

enacted several laws that drew the attention of international human rights organizations and the United States. Among them were laws banning critical coverage of the government on the radio and television in December 2004 and an amendment to the criminal code in March 2005 that allowed for the punishment of individuals criticizing the national government. Chávez also controlled much of the private sector through state control over Petroleum of Venezuela (PdVSA), the world's fifth largest oil exporter, and *Empresas Polar*, Venezuela's largest food and beer company. In the security realm, Venezuela cancelled a bilateral military exchange program with the United States and began making significant weapon purchases from Russia.⁹¹

By August 2005, Chávez had ceased relations with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and the State Department feared Chávez had ties to the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) based on ideological similarities and the ease enjoyed by the FARC and other leftist guerrilla groups in crossing the Colombia-Venezuela border. Regarding a long-time U.S. adversary, Chávez strengthened ties to Cuba by increasing preferential oil supplies in exchange for Cuban health care workers. Economically, he had pushed to weaken U.S. influence in the region by creating the Bolivian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), an alternative option to the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). He had also created PetroCaribe, a preferential oil program for the Caribbean.⁹² Chávez's Bolivarian revolution and anti-United States tactics were in full force.

C. BUSH AND CHÁVEZ

How did the United States respond to Chávez? It primarily stuck to the same method of denouncing Chávez's actions without taking any economic measures that would disrupt oil imports. One of the first areas the United States spoke out about was the undemocratic actions by the Chávez regime in arresting four leaders of the civic group *Súmate*. Founded in 2002, *Súmate* is a group dedicated to the promotion of democracy and the rights of Venezuelans to participate in the political process. They specifically

⁹¹ Sullivan, *Venezuela* (CRS Report No. RL32488, January 17, 2006), 10–16, 19–24.

⁹² Ibid., 10–16, 19–24.

play an important role in establishing transparency and protecting human rights.⁹³ Arrested for receiving U.S. assistance to encourage participation in the 2004 referendum, one of the leaders was María Corina Machado. Machado had become a key anti-Chávez ally of the United States and had personally met with President Bush in 2005. Machado herself faced up to 16 years in prison, and *Súmate* claimed that there were 200 other political prisoners facing a similar situation.⁹⁴ On November 17, 2005, the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere of the House International Relations Committee held a hearing on democracy in Venezuela at which an executive committee member of *Súmate* spoke and highlighted the human rights violations occurring in Venezuela, such as the unlawful detention of the group's leaders as well as baseless arrests of members of the political opposition.⁹⁵ The United States did not take any action against the government of Venezuela as a result of the testimony. Along the same lines, both State Department officials and then Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld expressed concern over Venezuela's pursuit of weapons. Regarding the break in cooperation with the DEA, the United States denied allegations that the administration was spying on Venezuela and expressed a desire to improve the relationship between the two states. Although not a government representative, U.S. television evangelist Pat Robertson exacerbated matters by declaring on television that the United States should assassinate Chávez. The message served as evidence to Chávez that the United States was meddling in Venezuelan affairs and prompted a formal response from State Department officials. Thomas Shannon, the new Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, testified to Congress in the same subcommittee hearing on November 17 that democracy in Venezuela was in danger. Chávez escalated matters by responding that Bush was a "crazy, genocidal killer." Following the December National Assembly elections, the United States chose to wait for official responses from the OAS and

93 *Súmate*, last modified November 4, 2014, <http://www.sumate.org>.

94 *Ibid.*, 10–11.

95 Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, House International Relations Committee, *Democracy in Venezuela* (Washington, DC: Office of Congressional Information and Publishing, November 17, 2005).

European Union (EU) observers before making a formal statement, but expressed concern at the voter abstention rate of 75 percent.⁹⁶

Halfway through the year, the United States recognized a downturn in the relationship as evidenced by the ongoing verbal attacks between the two countries. In response, the United States underwent a major reassessment of policy toward Venezuela. What had up to that point mostly been a policy of bilateral negotiations and use of the OAS became a new policy of supporting civil-society organizations in Venezuela and engaging other countries in an attempt to disperse some of Chávez's influence in the region. By continuing to support groups such as *Súmate* and other non-profit organizations opposed to Chávez, U.S. officials hoped to avoid further public spats with the Venezuelan president. The new strategy was met with caution as some members of the Bush administration feared the actions could instead worsen the relationship. Other recommendations that emerged out of the multiagency task force responsible for reassessing U.S. policy toward Venezuela included working with Chávez along areas of mutual concern such as drug trafficking, ceasing funding of partisan groups or groups that partook in the 2002 coup, and a longer-term approach of addressing the socio-economic situations that led to Chávez's rise, such as unemployment and crime, in both Venezuela and other Latin American countries.⁹⁷

D. BALANCING A DELICATE RELATIONSHIP (2005-2006)

Regardless of diplomatic actions by the United States, economically, U.S.-Venezuela relations continued to be strong. Through the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), the United States increased funding democratic projects in Venezuela from \$874,000 in FY2004, to \$902,000 in FY2005, and up to \$2 million in FY2006. A similar raise occurred in Economic Support Funds (ESF) for democratic projects, jumping from \$496,000 in FY2005 to \$500,000 in FY2006. The ARI, now known as the Andean Counterdrug Initiative (ACI), continued to provide funding, but as the efforts

⁹⁶ Sullivan, *Venezuela* (CRS Report No. RL32488, January 17, 2006), 12–15.

⁹⁷ Sullivan, *Venezuela* (CRS Report No. RL32488, January 17, 2006), 15–20; Juan Forero, “U.S. Considers Toughening Stance Toward Venezuela,” *New York Times*, April 26, 2005, http://www.nytimes.com/2005/04/26/international/americas/26venezuela.html?_r=0.

between Venezuela and the DEA weakened, so too did financial support from the United States. Although not an area that was directly funded by the U.S. government, oil continued to be the main justification for improving the relationship between the two states, especially as concerns arose that Venezuela was seeking China as a replacement market for the United States.⁹⁸

The United States did take actions against Venezuela, specifically for the latter's actions in the counter-narcotics effort and pursuit of foreign arms. On September 15, 2005, President Bush designated Venezuela as "a country that has failed demonstrably to adhere to its obligations under international narcotics agreements."⁹⁹ The declaration, part of an annually required certification under the Foreign Relations Authorization Act, is primarily used to enforce economic sanctions upon states that are not fulfilling their required duties as defined by the act.¹⁰⁰

The United States also refused to extradite three alleged Venezuelan terrorists. The first two, requested for extradition by Chávez in 2004, were Venezuelan National Guard lieutenants that allegedly bombed the Spanish Embassy and Colombian Consulate in Caracas. The two were detained by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and in February 2005 were denied asylum. Nevertheless, the United States chose not to extradite. The third individual, an anti-Castro activist, allegedly bombed a Cuban airliner in 1976, killing 73 people. The individual had been arrested in Venezuela but escaped in 1985 and illegally entered the United States from Mexico in April 2005. ICE detained the man on May 17, 2005, but chose to charge him with illegal entry into the United States, refusing to deport him to Venezuela for the stated reason that he may be tortured.¹⁰¹ Whether or not the United States was intentionally holding the three prisoners to spite Venezuela, the cases gave Chávez yet another conspiracy theory to increase his popular support and inadvertently created yet another talking point for Chávez regarding U.S. imperialism in the region.

⁹⁸ Sullivan, *Venezuela* (CRS Report No. RL32488, January 17, 2006), 1520.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁰⁰ No economic sanctions were taken against Venezuela.

¹⁰¹ Sullivan, *Venezuela* (CRS Report No. RL32488, January 17, 2006), 20–24.

If 2005 was a tumultuous year for United States-Venezuela affairs, the beginning of 2006 did little to make things better. On January 13, the State Department announced it had denied licenses of a technology transfer in a Spanish deal to sell planes to Venezuela. Although Spain went ahead with the deal by using non-U.S. technology, Chávez viewed the move as an effort by the United States to weaken Latin America.¹⁰² Less than a month later, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld made his remarks likening Chávez to Hitler (see above).¹⁰³ In May, the United States went one step further regarding technology transfer and, according to Section 40A of the Arms Export Control Act, prohibited the sale or license of weapons and services to Venezuela. This move was a response to weakening antiterrorism efforts within Venezuela, listing it alongside other countries that had been sanctioned under Section 40A, such as Cuba, Iran, North Korea, and Syria. Although the move shows dismay with the Venezuelan government, multiple CRS reports clarify that it does not list Venezuela as a state sponsor of terrorism under the Export Administration Act.

After years of condemning U.S. economic influence in Latin America, particularly as it relates to the FTAA, Venezuela formally joined the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) on July 4, 2006. The FTAA had been a topic of disagreement amongst the United States and Latin America since its proposal in 1994, but with Venezuela now a voting member of MERCOSUR, FTAA negotiations essentially came to a halt.¹⁰⁴

Threats by Chávez to disrupt the oil flow to the United States created other problems. In 2006, Venezuela still provided roughly 12 percent of all U.S. crude oil imports and by March, state-owned PdVSA had majority control of 25 of the 32 oil

¹⁰² Sullivan, *Venezuela* (CRS Report No. RL32488, January 17, 2006), 21.

¹⁰³ Associated Press, "Rumsfeld Likens Venezuela's Chávez to Hitler," NBC News, February 3, 2006, http://www.nbcnews.com/id/11159503/ns/world_news-americas/t/rumsfeld-likens-venezuelas-chavez-hitler/#.VAs3DkvEbqs.

¹⁰⁴ Mark P. Sullivan et al., *Latin America and the Caribbean: Issues for the 109th Congress* (CRS Report No. RL32733) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, September 13, 2006), 12–15.

operating agreements within Venezuela.¹⁰⁵ Even with 68 percent of its oil exports going to the United States, Chávez warned that his government would “blow up its oil fields if the United States ever were to attack.”¹⁰⁶ Although many saw Chávez’s growing threats as nothing more than rhetoric, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Richard Lugar requested a report on potential oil supply disruption, which was subsequently published by the Government Accountability Office in June 2006. The report concluded that not only would Venezuelan oil disruption decrease U.S. gross domestic product by \$23 billion, it would raise world prices to \$11 per barrel. The report also concluded, however, that the action would drive Venezuela into economic chaos and was unlikely to happen.¹⁰⁷

Events during the summer and fall of 2006 were equally detrimental to U.S.-Venezuela relations. On August 18, the United States announced the new position of Mission Manager for Cuba and Venezuela. The job would entail collating information on the two countries across all intelligence agencies. In one of his most memorable moments, Chávez referred to Bush as the devil in front of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly on September 20. The remarks were not taken well by members of the U.S. government, but they may have been even more hurtful for Chávez. In November, Chávez lost a months-long battle for a two-year seat on the UN Security Council. The seat was to be given to either Venezuela or Guatemala, but a two-thirds vote could not be achieved. In the end, Panama became the compromise candidate and took the seat. Some officials believe that Venezuela’s loss of the seat can partly be attributed to Chávez’s remarks in front of the UN General Assembly in September.¹⁰⁸

By the end of 2006, the U.S. 109th Congress had approved two resolutions against Venezuela. The first, Honorable Congress Resolution 400 (Burton) went through

¹⁰⁵ Mark P. Sullivan and Clare M. Ribando, *Latin America: Energy Supply, Political Developments, and U.S. Policy Approaches* (CRS Report No. RL33693) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, October 17, 2006), 7.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁰⁸ Mark P. Sullivan, *Venezuela: Political Conditions and U.S. Policy* (CRS Report No. RL32488) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, November 15, 2006), 20, 31.

on July 26 and criticized Venezuela's counternarcotics actions, specifically its disregard for international airport certifications designed to inhibit illegal trafficking. The second, Senate Resolution 607 (Bunning), condemned Chávez's September speech to the General Assembly and his undemocratic actions such as consolidating power domestically and destabilizing other countries in Latin America.

Come November, the Council on Foreign Relations proposed yet another strategy for conducting business with Chávez. This time, the report argued, the United States should ignore Chávez's often over-the-top rhetoric and should instead focus on bilateral and regional concerns such as energy security and terrorism. In the long-term, the report once again recommended addressing underlying socio-economic issues that led to Chávez's election in the first place, such as inequality and poverty.¹⁰⁹ In the final major event of the year, Chávez won reelection on December 3 with 63 percent of the popular vote, to 37 percent won by the opposition candidate, Manuel Rosales. Although there were rumors of misuse of state assets to promote Chávez's campaign, the election was largely considered legitimate. Both the OAS and the EU monitored the election and stated that it was held legally and in a satisfactory manner. Even the United States respected the election and declared that it was positive to see a clear winner and that the opposition accepted the results.¹¹⁰

E. EMERGING THREATS (2007-2008)

Early into 2007, the United States became more and more focused on two topics in Venezuela: threats to democracy and the country's military buildup. The first major threat to democracy issue was Chávez's decision not to renew the expiring contract for Radio Caracas Television (RCTV), Venezuela's oldest television station. The action was important enough to call the attention of the OAS, and on January 5, 2007, OAS Secretary General José Miguel Insulza stated that the action gave the appearance of

¹⁰⁹ Mark P. Sullivan and Nelson Olhero, *Venezuela: Political Conditions and U.S. Policy* (CRS Report No. RL32488) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, March 12, 2007), 25.

¹¹⁰ Mark P. Sullivan, *Venezuela: Political Conditions and U.S. Policy* (CRS Report No. RL32488) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, December 22, 2006), 12, 21; U.S. Library of Congress, Senate Resolution 607, 109th Congress (Washington, DC: Office of Congressional Information and Publishing, December 6, 2006).

government censorship. RCTV had in fact often presented material critical of Chávez, but regardless of censorship allegations, the Venezuelan administration went through with the action. Additionally, the National Assembly voted on January 31 to give Chávez power for 18 months to enact presidential decrees. U.S. representatives feared that the new powers were leaning toward authoritarianism and detracted from democratic processes.¹¹¹

Chávez also continued to pursue weapons procurement from Russia, having secured contracts for 24 Sukhoi Su-30 fighter jets, 50 military helicopters, 100,000 Kalashnikov assault rifles, a license for a Kalashnikov factory in Venezuela, and potentially two or three submarines. The amount of weapons coming into Venezuela created multiple concerns for the United States. First, there were still concerns about Chávez's ties to the FARC and that the incoming weapons would be used against Colombia. Second, the U.S. Director of National Intelligence, John Negroponte, believed that the influx of weapons could potentially lead to a regional arms race. Finally, Venezuela was strengthening its ties to Iran. Although the evidence at the time only signaled economic ties, such as a \$2 billion investment fund agreed to between Chávez and then Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, there was also fear that the relationship could provide access to terrorists through lax border security and customs inspections.¹¹²

Venezuela continued its undemocratic actions, often at the expense of the United States. On May 1, 2007, Chávez forced out two significant U.S. oil companies that had been working on Orinoco River Basin projects. The two companies, Phillips and Exxon Mobil, were negotiating a price of \$5 billion for the being forced out, but the projects were taken over by PdVSA without any compensation.¹¹³

Toward the year's end, a controversial reform to the constitution came to a vote. On December 2, 2007, Venezuelans ultimately voted against 69 constitutional

¹¹¹ Sullivan and Olhero, *Venezuela* (CRS Report No. RL32488, March 12, 2007), 7, 14, 31.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 32, 36.

¹¹³ Mark P. Sullivan and Nelson Olhero, *Venezuela: Political Conditions and U.S. Policy* (CRS Report No. RL32488) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, September 4, 2007), 32.

amendments, although the margin of victory was very small. For more specifics on the constitutional amendments, refer to Chapter II. Many opposition leaders, including former presidential candidate Manuel Rosales, referred to the reforms as a constitutional coup.¹¹⁴ Bush responded to the vote by commending the Venezuelan people for promoting democracy and rejecting one-man rule.¹¹⁵

In 2008, Chávez focused his efforts toward his neighbors in a year that was marked by a constant back and forth between the Venezuelan president and Colombian President Alvaro Uribe. For the United States, this created yet another foreign policy dilemma as Uribe had established himself as a key ally to both the government and military thanks to the ARI and Plan Colombia. In January and February 2008, Chávez personally negotiated the release of multiple Colombian and Venezuelan hostages from the FARC. On March 1, 2008, the United States and Colombia celebrated a Colombian raid of a FARC camp in Ecuador that killed the FARC's second in command. Venezuela, upset by the unauthorized act by Colombia within a sovereign state, immediately cut ties with Uribe. Although the United States found no hard evidence to support the claims, computers seized in the raid allegedly linked Chávez to the FARC and said that the Venezuelan government had given more than \$300 million to the terrorist group. Within the U.S. government, the alleged ties served as yet another basis for distrust toward Chávez. In response to a perceived threat from Colombia, Chávez mobilized troops at the Colombia-Venezuela border, but U.S. officials saw the event as an empty threat due to the small size of the Venezuelan military. Just days later, Chávez led negotiation talks at a Rio Group summit and was praised by the OAS Secretary General for deescalating tensions by peacefully negotiating a resolution with Uribe. On June 8, Chávez once again surprised the United States by calling for the unconditional release of all FARC hostages and that the FARC lay down their weapons. As had come to be expected from Chávez's Venezuela, however, two senior Venezuelan intelligence officials and the former interior

¹¹⁴ Mark P. Sullivan, *Venezuela's December 2, 2007 Constitutional Referendum* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, December 18, 2007), 1–6.

¹¹⁵ Mark P. Sullivan and Nelson Olhero, *Venezuela: Political Conditions and U.S. Policy* (CRS Report No. RL32488) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, January 11, 2008), 34.

minister were linked to the FARC, and the U.S. Treasury subsequently froze their assets on September 12, 2008.¹¹⁶

Tensions between Venezuela and Colombia were not the only trouble area for the U.S.-Venezuelan relations in 2008. After an improvement in relations in the summer and fall, Chávez expelled the U.S. ambassador to Venezuela, Patrick Duddy, in September 2008, alleging the U.S. was conspiring to assassinate the Venezuelan president. In response, the United States expelled the Venezuelan ambassador, Bernardo Alvarez. Venezuela also continued to arm, receiving a \$1 billion loan from Russia in September for weapons. Diplomatic ties to Iran grew as well, and by this time Hezbollah was officially connected to Venezuela through financing. In response, the U.S. Treasury froze the assets of two Venezuelans on June 18 for financially supporting the terrorist group.¹¹⁷

Although Chávez's foreign policy seemed to be working in his favor, his party strength domestically began to show weakness. Having consolidated all of his supporting parties into the singular United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), Chávez and his supporters nonetheless seemed to be losing steam in the weeks up to the November state and local elections. By some accounts, his popularity rating had dropped as low as 34 percent. Surprisingly, the PSUV won 17 of the 22 governor positions and more than 80 percent of the mayoral races. Domestic and international groups criticized the government's lack of transparency, particularly the fact that 272 individuals from the opposition had been disqualified from running because an alleged misuse of government funds. Even when it seemed Chávez was at his weakest, the PSUV was still able to ensure whole-of-government power in the executive, National Assembly, and state and municipal offices.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Mark P. Sullivan, *Venezuela: Political Conditions and U.S. Policy* (CRS Report No. RL32488) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, February 5, 2009), 45–47.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 19, 20, 34–35, 43, 51.

¹¹⁸ Sullivan, *Venezuela* (CRS Report No. RL32488, February 5, 2009), 19, 20, 34–35, 43, 51.

F. U.S.-VENEZUELA RELATIONS UNDER THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION (2009)

With a new president in Barack Obama, there was some hope that the United States-Venezuela relationship would get a fresh start, and to an extent, it did. Even with Obama already criticizing Chávez, a week before he had been inaugurated, Chávez remained hopeful that the United States could have a good relationship with Venezuela, as long as Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton had the right attitude.¹¹⁹ To set the tone, Chávez presented Obama with a gift at their first meeting in April 2009 at the Summit of the Americas in Trinidad and Tobago. The gift was a copy of Eduardo Galeano's Latin American classic, *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent*, a scathing take on how developed countries have taken advantage of Latin America throughout history.¹²⁰ By June, the relationship had improved enough for the two states to return their respective ambassadors.

Despite the promise of stronger relations, the U.S. government grew concerned about Chávez's continued actions to centralize his power. On February 15, and with a 70 percent voter turnout, the two-term limit for presidency was revoked, meaning Chávez could run again for office in 2012. Chávez's campaign, based on the idea that he only wanted to serve until his Bolivarian project was complete in 2019, was once again largely funded by the state. Shortly thereafter, he moved to take power back from elected opposition officials, using the Navy to seize significant ports and imprisoning officials for corruption. Having already secured RCTV, the government also began to pressure the owner of Globovision, another channel that expressed views contradictory to Chávez's. In July 2009, he began administrative proceedings to revoke the license of more than a third of the radio stations in Venezuela.¹²¹ The moves represented a significant attempt to consolidate power and silence opposition. In response, U.S. officials denounced Chávez. During her confirmation hearing to become the Secretary of State, Hillary

¹¹⁹ Mark P. Sullivan, *Venezuela: Political Conditions and U.S. Policy* (CRS Report No. RL32488) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, July 28, 2009), 37.

¹²⁰ Jake Tapper, "Chavez Gifts Obama With Book That Assails U.S. for Exploiting Latin America," ABC News, April 18, 2009, <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2009/04/chavez-gifts-ob/>.

¹²¹ Sullivan, *Venezuela* (CRS Report No. RL32488, July 28, 2009), 21–26.

Clinton declared that Chávez was a “democratically elected leader who does not govern democratically.” Obama echoed the sentiment, stating just a week before his inauguration in 2009 that Chávez “has been a force that has impeded progress in the region.”¹²²

The United States became further alarmed due to newly uncovered evidence that Chávez had ties to the FARC. On July 20, 2009, the U.S. Government Accountability Office published a report regarding Venezuela’s counternarcotics efforts. The report found widespread corruption in Venezuelan government officials, ties to illegally armed groups in Colombia, and a lack of a desire to cooperate with the United States. Finally, the report concluded that Venezuela significantly hurts the United States’ ability to interfere with illegal drug trafficking by allowing drugs to freely flow along its border with Colombia and into the Caribbean.¹²³ President Obama himself stated that Venezuela was “exporting terrorist activities” and “supporting malicious entities like the FARC.”¹²⁴

Showing the FARC concerns were not just those of Colombia and the United States, Sweden confronted Venezuela on July 27, 2009, regarding three Swedish anti-tank rocket launchers that were purchased by Venezuela in the 1980s and recovered from a FARC arms cache in October 2008. The Venezuelan government denied its role in the exchange, but it could not deny that government-purchased weapons had in fact ended up in the hands of the FARC. The transfer of Venezuelan weapons to the FARC created concern for the United States, as Venezuela had spent more than \$5.3 billion in arms purchases since 2005. DNI Michael McConnell determined in 2008 that such a large amount, estimated to be more than three to four times as much as what would be needed for external defense, was not a significant threat because of logistical and maintenance

¹²² Sullivan, *Venezuela* (CRS Report No. RL32488, July 28, 2009), 37.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹²⁴ Juan Forero, “Obama and Chávez Start Sparring Early,” *Washington Post*, January 19, 2009, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/01/18/AR2009011802325.html>.

issues within Venezuela, but unusable weapons could easily be sold to groups like the FARC.¹²⁵

G. VENEZUELA'S TIES TO IRAN (2009–2010)

As Venezuelan ties to the FARC began to emerge, so too did ties to an even greater threat for the United States: Iran and Hezbollah. The second half of 2009 was characterized by deepening ties between Venezuela and its Middle Eastern partner Iran. In April 2009, during one of his trips to Iran, Chávez and Ahmadinejad inaugurated a \$200 million mutual development bank. Commercial flights between the two states flew on a weekly basis and were subject to only cursory immigration and customs controls. By September, Venezuela and Iran had signed three energy memorandums of understanding, with the most important aspect being a guarantee of gasoline exports from Venezuela to Iran in the event of UN or U.S. sanctions. Any funds received out of that particular situation would be deposited into Iranian machinery and technology purchases for Venezuela. This particular agreement will become pertinent a year later. With many UN countries criticizing Iran's nuclear program, Chávez openly supported their desire for peaceful nuclear energy. Although there were no indicators of nuclear technology transfer between the two states, the United States remained concerned about the potentially dangerous development. In response to the new information, the House Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere held a hearing titled "Iran in the Western Hemisphere."¹²⁶ Representing the significance of Venezuela's ties to Iran, the U.S. Treasury imposed multiple sanctions on Iranian individuals and banks within Venezuela.¹²⁷

At the start of 2010, the Obama administration's hopes for mutual respect in Venezuela were dwindling. Perhaps DNI Dennis Blair best communicated U.S. concerns in his speech to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence on February 2 of that year: "Chávez and his allies are likely to oppose nearly every U.S. policy initiative in the region, including the expansion of free trade, counter drug and counterterrorism

¹²⁵ Forero, "Obama and Chávez," 44-46.

¹²⁶ Mark P. Sullivan, *Venezuela: Issues in the 111th Congress* (CRS Report No. R40938) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, November 17, 2009), 5, 27-30.

¹²⁷ Sullivan, *Venezuela* (CRS Report No. RL32488, July 28, 2009), 52.

cooperation, military training, and security initiatives, and even U.S. assistance programs.”¹²⁸ The year was mired by decreasing cooperation from the Venezuelan government, constant feuding between Venezuela and Colombia, and increasing ties between Iran and Venezuela.

Perhaps the most significant action taken by the United States, although not directly related to Venezuela, was the July 1, 2010, approved sanctioning of Iran under P.L. 111–195, Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act of 2010. Although there were initial questions as to whether or not Venezuela would be able to supply gasoline to Iran, based on its past inability to supply sufficient domestic quantities, there were multiple gasoline shipments between the two countries in 2010. In 2010, the U.S. government was still attempting to determine if the shipments were violating the sanctions. Regardless, Chávez was staying loyal to his ally in Iran, even in the face of U.S. sanctions. Reports also surfaced in April 2010 that Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Qods Force was increasing its presence in Latin America, specifically in Venezuela, although the commander of USSOUTHCOM later dispelled these claims.¹²⁹ The alleged ties to Iran, even if unfounded, remained a significant talking point for members of Congress.

H. OPPOSITION GROWS AND CHÁVEZ WEAKENS (2010-2011)

In 2010, one of Chávez’s staunchest regional critics, President Uribe, was on his way out, creating an opportunity for Chávez to decrease some of the U.S. regional influence it had through Colombia. In one of his outgoing speeches as president, Uribe made it clear that he believed Venezuela was still harboring FARC guerrillas. Venezuela responded by suspending diplomatic ties with its neighbor on July 22. New Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos renewed the relationship on August 10 and convinced Chávez to attempt to increase trade. A few months later, on November 2, 2010, the two states signed multiple economic and social agreements, as well as a shared border area.

¹²⁸ Mark P. Sullivan, *Venezuela: Issues in the 111th Congress* (CRS Report No. R40938) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, February 8, 2010), 1.

¹²⁹ Mark P. Sullivan, *Venezuela: Issues for Congress* (CRS Report No. R40938) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, March 11, 2011), 40-42.

The new relationship seemed to be improving and the United States noted a reduction in Venezuelan support for the FARC as border security improved, more arrests were made, and more drugs were confiscated.¹³⁰

Chávez may have been adopting a new strategy with Colombia, but his credibility back home was slipping. With one of the highest crime rates in the world and a now contracting economy, Chávez faced a true political challenge in the September 26 National Assembly election. Although the PSUV still won 98 of the 165 seats, it was widely seen as a loss for Chávez. The opposition, now united under the coalition Democratic Unity Platform (MUD), won enough seats to keep Chávez from having the three-fifths and two-thirds majorities in the National Assembly to push through a wide array of new laws. No external election monitoring groups were allowed in, but 30 witnesses from abroad did declare the elections fair.¹³¹

Unfortunately for the MUD, the outgoing National Assembly pushed through several laws in December 2010, including 18 months of decree power for Chávez. Washington heavily opposed the move, with both the Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs and the left-leaning Washington Office on Latin America declaring the actions an assault on popular will. The new laws also placed restrictions on Internet traffic similar to those already in place on television and radio. Implicating U.S. efforts that have aided the opposition, Chávez also passed the Law of the Defense of Political Sovereignty and National Self-Determination, limiting foreign assistance to civil society groups in Venezuela.¹³² Chávez's heavy handed response to the legislative elections helped secure his place as relevant in U.S. foreign policy in Latin America for at least two more years, until the scheduled 2012 presidential election.

The year 2011 was relatively quiet in terms of actions between the Venezuela and the United States. For Venezuela, the economy continued to drop while inflation rose. Even with a now 211 billion barrels of proven oil reserves, up from the previous 99

¹³⁰ Sullivan, *Venezuela* (CRS Report No. R40938, March 11, 2011), 37-39.

¹³¹ Mark P. Sullivan, *Venezuela: Issues for Congress* (CRS Report No. R40938) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, June 27, 2011), 6–10.

¹³² Sullivan, *Venezuela* (CRS Report No. R40938, June 27, 2011), 6–10.

billion thanks to the inclusion of heavy Orinoco Belt oil, Chávez was forced to modify their exchange rate for the second time in as many years, overvaluing the *Bolivar Fuerte*. Economic problems were accompanied by consistent blackouts across the country and rationing for shortages of public goods like food and water. Regarding Venezuelan natural resources, the United States determined on May 24, 2011, that PdVSA had violated the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act of 2010 by providing two shipments of reformat to Iran.¹³³ As a result, PdVSA was “prohibited from competing for U.S. government procurement contracts, securing financing from the Export-Import Bank, and obtaining U.S. export licenses.”¹³⁴ Of particular note, the sanctions specifically left out Citgo, a subsidiary of PdVSA and major supplier of oil to the United States, and any language limiting the export of oil to the United States. Considering 51 percent of Venezuela’s exports go to the United States, the sanctions were mostly viewed as a weak warning.¹³⁵

I. CONTINUED DETERIORATION OF U.S.-VENEZUELA RELATIONS (2011–2012)

Although President Obama had expressed some interest in renewing Venezuelan relations at the beginning of his first campaign, his second campaign saw a return to a similar policy approach to the one used by Bush. Rather than engaging Chávez in rhetorical spats in the media, Obama opted for a policy of avoiding direct arguments with Chávez while still speaking out about Venezuela’s links to undemocratic actions, drug trafficking, and terrorism. Adding to U.S. frustrations, Chávez appointed General Henry Rangel Silva as his defense minister in 2012. Silva not only had a long history working with Chávez, he was also under U.S. sanctions for ties with the FARC that dated back to 2008.¹³⁶ The United States was also forced to respond when the Venezuelan Consul General in Miami was caught on a Mexican documentary attempting to recruit Mexican

¹³³ Sullivan, *Venezuela* (CRS Report No. R40938, June 27, 2011), 13–16, 20, 27.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 16, 20.

¹³⁶ Mark P. Sullivan et al., *Latin America and the Caribbean: U.S. Policy and Key Issues for Congress in 2012* (CRS Report No. R42360) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, February 14, 2012), 7, 13.

students for cyber attacks against the United States. The Department of State declared her as persona non grata on January 8, but her alleged ties to Iran reinforced U.S. beliefs that Iran was still a negative presence in the region.¹³⁷

Around the same time, Chávez was returning to his presidential duties following a bout with cancer for which he had been treated several times in late 2011. Providing a nine-hour address to the National Assembly on January 13, he attempted to show he was back to full strength, only to be sidelined again weeks later when the cancer returned. An old wrongdoing resurfaced for Chávez when ExxonMobil won a suit at the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID) for \$900 million in reimbursements for when Chávez seized and nationalized its assets. Rather than make the payment, which was significantly lower than ExxonMobil had demanded when the case began, Chávez announced he would withdraw from the ICSID and would not recognize the decision.¹³⁸

After two years of economic decline, 2011 and 2012 saw growth. This proved convenient as it allowed Chávez to return to government spending on social programs as part of his reelection campaign. One plan in particular provided nearly 200,000 housing units for those without a place to live. An August 25 explosion at an oil refinery killed more than 40 people and raised concerns about PdVSA's maintenance and management ability, but the Chávez regime was able to pass it off as an unpreventable accident. Denying any human rights abuses within his border, Chávez continued to deny representatives of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights access to his borders, a practice he had been conducting for nearly a decade, but he went one step farther in July 2012 by declaring Venezuela's withdrawal from the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.¹³⁹ Also in July, the U.S. Treasury enforced sanctions on three more Venezuelans with alleged ties to Hezbollah. Recognizing the ties while not placing too much significance to them, Obama stated in a press interview in July that Chavez's

¹³⁷ Mark P. Sullivan, *Venezuela: Issues for Congress* (CRS Report No. R40938) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, March 29, 2012), 9, 15, 21.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 9, 15, 21.

¹³⁹ Mark P. Sullivan, *Venezuela: Issues for Congress* (CRS Report No. R40938) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, August 30, 2012), 14, 25, 32.

actions with Iran the past several years had not created any significant national security concern for the United States.¹⁴⁰ By fall, however, attention shifted from ties to Iran and human rights violations and focused solely on the October presidential election. On October 7, 80.7 percent of the voters showed up and reelected Chávez with 55 percent of the vote over MUD's candidate Henrique Capriles. In a relatively surprising move, the White House praised the 6 million voters for their peaceful participation and said that their voices would be respected in the future relationship between the United States and Venezuela. Two months later, the PSUV won 20 of the 23 state elections and it seemed *Chavismo* was back on the rise until Chávez's health took a turn for the worse in December.¹⁴¹

J. CHÁVEZ'S FALL AND MADURO'S PRESIDENCY (2012–PRESENT)

By late 2012, Chávez's health had worsened and he had handpicked newly appointed Vice President Nicolás Maduro as his replacement. On March 5, 2013, Chávez ultimately lost his battle with cancer and passed away. Recognizing the coming change, the United States began to back away from its standard criticism of Venezuela. Following Chávez's death, Obama opted for a statement supporting the people of Venezuela and an opportunity to improve bilateral relations, completely avoiding the traditional condolences for loss of a head of state. Meanwhile, Maduro took the oath of office on March 8 and a new presidential election was scheduled for April 14, pitting Maduro against former MUD candidate Henrique Capriles. Riding the wave of support for Chávez and his by-name replacement recommendation, Maduro continued to use state resources for his campaign and defeated Capriles by a 1.49 percent margin. International election monitoring groups were barred from the event, but the Carter Center and domestic observers were highly critical of the legality of the campaign process and the

¹⁴⁰ Mark P. Sullivan, *Venezuela: Issues for Congress* (CRS Report No. R40938) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, January 10, 2013), 47–49.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 8–14.

election itself. The opposition filed two challenges to the Supreme Court over the ruling, but on August 7, both were dismissed and criticized for insulting to the court.¹⁴²

With new, significant changes in the political arena and recognizing a potential opportunity to improve relations, Secretary of State John Kerry met with Venezuelan Vice President Elías Jaua in June 2013 at an OAS General Assembly meeting. Both agreed to continue open dialogue in an effort to improve relations, but engagement became problematic a month later when Maduro openly offered asylum to U.S. classified information leaker Edward Snowden. Soon thereafter, Venezuela announced it was ceasing any effort to improve relations with the United States after Obama's nominee for UN Ambassador, Samantha Power, stated that Maduro was engaging in a crackdown on civil society.¹⁴³

By March 2013, Maduro made his first foray into the expelling of diplomats game that Chávez had grown accustomed to. It began with Maduro expelling two U.S. military attachés, a move that was returned by the United States with the expulsion of two Venezuelan diplomats. In September, Maduro expelled three more U.S. diplomats for allegedly attempting to destabilize Venezuela. The United States responded in kind, expelling three Venezuelan diplomats in October, including Calixto Ortega, who was reportedly being considered for the position of Ambassador to the United States. Kerry opened up to Venezuela again in December following the municipal elections, expressing disappointment in the way the relationship had fallen apart but hope that it could get better. Throughout the year, the United States continued with three annual declarations that by then were common in denouncing actions by Venezuela. The first was the State Department's human rights report for Venezuela. For more than a decade, the report had accused Venezuela of consolidating control in the executive and censoring free press. The 2013 report made specific note of Venezuela's official withdrawal from the Inter-

¹⁴² Mark P. Sullivan, *Venezuela: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. R43239) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, September 16, 2013), 7-11, 18.

¹⁴³ Sullivan, *Venezuela* (CRS Report No. R43239, February 28, 2014), 20-21, 24, 31-34.

American Court of Human Rights on September 10, 2013, and the alleged 21 political prisoners in Venezuelan jails.¹⁴⁴

The second annual declaration was Obama's determination under the Foreign Relations Authorization Act that Venezuela was not adhering to its anti-drug obligations, the ninth consecutive year the U.S. president had determined as much. Although Maduro was not as strongly suspected of ties to the FARC as Chávez had been, there were still many important officials in the regime believed to be working with the terrorist group. The third report, the *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report* of March 2013, stated that Venezuela remained an important route of drug traffickers, with the supply often ending up in the Eastern Caribbean, Central America, the United States, Western Africa, or Europe. Finally, in May 2013 Venezuela was once again determined to be uncooperative with the United States in its antiterrorism efforts for the seventh consecutive year. The determination ensured that arms exports from the United States to Venezuela would remain illegal.¹⁴⁵

In early 2014, social unrest resulting from violence and economic problems, among other topics, reached a breaking point and violent protests emerged around the country. Both the OAS and the Obama administration called for peaceful negotiations between Maduro and the opposition. Panama in particular asked for a special meeting of the OAS on February 27, leading to Maduro's suspension of diplomatic ties with Panama on March 5. The OAS finally met on March 7, but much to the dismay of the United States, the subsequent resolution highlighted the principle of non-intervention and supported Maduro. Only the United States, Panama, and Canada opposed the resolution. Just over two weeks later on March 21, Panama once again raised the issue at the OAS, this time having made Venezuelan National Assembly member Maria Corina Machado a special member of its delegation. The OAS rejected Panama's request and Machado was stripped of her National Assembly position for her actions. The Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), a regional organization along the lines of the OAS, also met on March 12 and approved a resolution supporting Maduro. By April, UNASUR had begun

¹⁴⁴ Sullivan, *Venezuela* (CRS Report No. R43239, February 28, 2014), 20-21, 24, 31-34.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 20-21, 24, 31-34.

to lead negotiations between Maduro and the opposition, using the church as an intermediary. The United States recognized its inability to negotiate with Maduro bilaterally and instead opted for a strategy of supporting the UNASUR-led negotiations. Nevertheless, Kerry and Assistant Secretary of State Jacobson Roberta Jacobson claimed sanctions were still a valid option. Congress responded also, both in the House and in the Senate, by approving resolutions that supported the people of Venezuela. The Senate resolution in particular, Senate Resolution 365 of March 12, called for the President to impose sanctions.¹⁴⁶

K. CONCLUSION

Having provided a detailed description of events between 2000 and 2014, the problem then becomes identifying a consistent U.S. policy throughout. The running theme throughout the decade has been one of maintaining access to Venezuela's natural resources. Even after nearly 15 years of a tumultuous relationship, Venezuela remains the fourth-largest exporter of crude oil to the United States.¹⁴⁷ The lengths the United States would go to achieve these ends were present in the sanctioning of Venezuela for its exports to Iran. Not only did the United States exclude its own subsidiary of PdVSA Citgo, it also excluded all forms of export from Venezuela to the United States. Second to access to natural resources, the United States also attempted to promote counterterrorism, counternarcotics, and human rights throughout. The consistency of these secondary missions can be found throughout the U.S. government. Even General Bantz Craddock, Commander of USSOUTHCOM stated in 2005 that the United States needed a "broad based interagency approach to dealing with Venezuela in order to encourage functioning democratic institutions."¹⁴⁸ Almost each time the United States publicly spoke out against actions by Chávez or Maduro, the comments targeted terrorism, drugs, or human rights. These public outcries were often accompanied by economic changes, either by taking away funds for combatting terrorism and drugs or increasing funds to support

¹⁴⁶ Mark P. Sullivan, *Venezuela: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. R43239) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, April 11, 2014), 11–16, 24–26.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 2014, 31.

¹⁴⁸ Bantz Craddock, U.S. Southern Command Posture Statement, March 9, 2005, 7.

groups like *Súmate*. At times, policy shifted between negotiating bilaterally and using international organizations. In recent years, however, Venezuela seemed to opt more toward using either UNASUR or the OAS, recognizing its decisions carried more weight when backed up by other countries. Making any policy option difficult was Chávez, U.S. officials stressed on multiple occasions how it seemed impossible to do right in the eyes of Venezuelans, and this was largely part of Chávez's Bolivarian Revolution and its anti-imperialism mission. Maduro has continued to do the same early on in his term as President, but it is hard to match the popular support and charisma of Chávez. For now, it appears the United States is content in occasionally denouncing actions by Maduro, as long as a legitimate threat to his natural resources does not arise.

IV. DIPLOMACY AND THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES

A. INTRODUCTION

The United States' evolving relationship to and role in the Organization of American States (OAS) is one indicator of decreased U.S. influence in Latin America. This decrease can be linked, in part, to U.S. policies toward Venezuela. In Latin America, the OAS has served as one of the key conflict management institutions in the western hemisphere for more than 60 years. As U.S.-Venezuela relations began to sour in the 2000s, the OAS may have seemed to be the most logical choice to work out the differences. In fact, both academics and policymakers for the United States and Venezuela made such a recommendation, and as this chapter will highlight, the countries obliged in certain instances. Rather than pursue points of mutual agreement within the OAS, the United States often found itself acting outside of the majority.

To understand how the OAS has remained an important venue for U.S. engagement with Latin America, and yet also how the United States has, especially through its policies toward Venezuela, isolated itself to a certain extent from the OAS, this chapter will first provide a background on the creation, roles, and evolution of the OAS. These competing organizations therefore indicate further reduction in U.S. influence in the region, a reduction furthered by U.S.-Venezuela relations. As this thesis is concerned with United States and Venezuela relations, it will then pinpoint key crises between the two states and how the OAS reacted. The chapter concludes with the argument that the OAS is an organization that largely acts on consensus, a factor that now leaves the United States in the minority.

B. INFLUENCING THE CREATION OF THE OAS

Formally created on April 30, 1948, with the signing of the OAS Charter in Bogotá, Colombia, the OAS represented the culmination of a long history of international

cooperation within Latin America.¹⁴⁹ For its part, however, the United States entered into the OAS with a fundamentally different perspective than its Latin American counterparts. In his article “International Cooperation in Latin America: the Design of Regional Institutions by Slow Accretion,” Jorge I. Domínguez points to honoring inherited boundaries, defending sovereignty and nonintervention, mediating disputes, and weak implementation of agreements as four historical tendencies within Latin America that were present during the creation of the OAS.¹⁵⁰

Domínguez traces the idea of regionalism within Latin America back to Simón Bolívar’s liberation of much of South America from Spain in the 1800s. By 1822 Bolívar had created Gran Colombia out of what is now known as Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, and Panama, and in 1826, he held a Spanish American international conference in Panama. The three-week gathering consisted of members from Gran Colombia, Mexico, Central America, and Peru and created multiple treaties designed to increase cooperation and regional security, among other topics. Bolívar’s dream of a unified Latin America fell apart only a few years later, but it serves as a moment in time to which the start of regional cooperation can be attributed.¹⁵¹

For the next 100 years, the United States and Latin America embarked on different paths of development. Whereas the United States continued to expand its territory throughout the 1800s, Latin America settled upon a principle of *uti possidetis juris*, one that would come to be used around the globe as a legal right within international law. In this context, Latin American states accepted the boundaries emplaced by their former colonial powers, with future conflicts only concerning relatively small pieces of land and not large masses that would redefine the structure of the state. Without the threat of invasion from neighboring countries, Latin Americans began to develop their national identities without needing to address security concerns.

¹⁴⁹ Peter J. Meyer, *Organization of American States: Background and Issues for Congress* (CRS Report No. R42639) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, August 29, 2014), 2.

¹⁵⁰ Jorge I. Domínguez, “International Cooperation in Latin America: the Design of Regional Institutions by Slow Accretion,” in *Crafting Cooperation: Regional International Institutions in Comparative Perspective*, eds. Amitav Acharya and Alastair Iain Johnston (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 90–95.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 85–87.

As Domínguez notes, only six border violations led to armed conflict in nearly 200 years of independence. While the United States engulfed more and more land in an effort to increase security, Latin American states found peaceful methods to accept their boundaries.¹⁵²

As interstate wars began to fade in the late 1800s, the question shifted to one of when to intervene in another state's internal affairs. At the time, both the United States and European countries agreed that they had the right to protect their citizens, businesses, and Western interests regardless of where those individuals and entities may be located. Latin American countries, on the other hand, acted in accordance with the perspective of Argentine international jurist Carlos Calvo who believed that state sovereignty was an inviolable right, an idea that became known as the Calvo Doctrine. Argentine Foreign Minister Luis Drago furthered Calvo's position in 1902 by arguing with the Drago Doctrine that the United States and other European states were unlawful in their efforts to collect foreign debt through armed intervention. Both matters were brought up in international environments, with the Calvo Doctrine taking issue at the First International Conference of American States in Washington, DC, in 1889, and the Drago Doctrine emerging at the Third Conference, this time in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1906. In both instances Latin American states favored doctrines that the United States opposed.¹⁵³

In addition to respecting both boundaries and state sovereignty, Latin Americans also developed a keen ability to resolve disputes through mediation. Beginning in the 1880s, the ability to peacefully negotiate solutions can partially be attributed to the nearly 40-year absence of interstate war in Latin America until the 1920s. As conflict in the region rose between 1925 and 1942, one could reasonably expect the amount of mediation to drop as states turned to arming instead of negotiating. Instead, mediation increased, even crossing subregion as South American states aided in Central American affairs and vice versa. Although the United States was involved in both disputes and

¹⁵² Domínguez, "International Cooperation," 90–91.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 91–93.

resolutions, the ability to peacefully mediate truly emerged as a distinct Latin American feature leading up to the creation of the OAS.¹⁵⁴

A final tendency within Latin American states prior to the establishment of the OAS was one of weak implementation. Domínguez once again ties this trait back to Bolívar and the Panama Congress in 1826. Although multiple accords and treaties were signed at the conference, Gran Colombia had disintegrated just three years later and few of the states had actually implemented the policies put forth in those agreements. Looking ahead nearly 100 years, the International Conference of American States in Santiago, Chile, in 1923 saw similar results. Under the leadership of Paraguay, the states represented signed the first inter-American treaty on international security where each signatory agreed not to use its military against another member. Six years later, an even more detailed agreement came out of a specialized conference in Washington, D.C., with the support of all OAS member states. Nevertheless, within 10 years, few of the countries had ratified the agreement, and Paraguay, the originating force behind security cooperation, had begun a violent war against Bolivia, demonstrating the non-binding nature of the international security treaty.¹⁵⁵

C. THE OAS EMERGES

The United States had consistently expressed an interest in Latin America, even if the tendencies of the region differed from its own. Until the 1930s, the relationship from the U.S. perspective can most specifically be considered as part of the Monroe Doctrine. Established in 1823, the Monroe Doctrine intended for the United States to protect Latin American from states outside of the hemisphere, while exerting its own influence in the region. Serving as one of the main arguments for the likes of Calvo and Drago as forceful intervention in Latin American affairs, the United States ultimately transitioned to what would come to be known as President Franklin Roosevelt's Good Neighbor policy, opting for a similar policy of non-intervention as the one Latin American states had been

¹⁵⁴ Domínguez, "International Cooperation," 93–94.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 94–95.

using since their independence.¹⁵⁶ As a sign of the positive turn in the relationship, the United States and Latin American countries signed the Convention on the Rights and Duties of States in 1933, not only recognizing the equality of states, but also the principle of nonintervention. Although World War II took a large amount of the attention of the United States away from Latin America, there were significant moments of cooperation, leading to the signing of the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance, also known as the Rio Treaty, in 1947. It was at this point, after more than 100 years of cooperation, that the region created its most powerful organization to date, with the signing of the OAS Charter and the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man in 1948. This event can be marked as the formal start of what is today known as the inter-American system.¹⁵⁷

Making up the OAS are three main bodies: the General Assembly, Permanent Council, and General Secretariat. The General Assembly serves as the policy creation branch and meets annually. With representatives of all 34 member states, each holding a single and equal vote, the General Assembly makes decisions based on an absolute majority of affirmative votes. There are certain decisions such as the approval of the budget that require a two-thirds vote, but for the most part the decisions are based on a simple majority vote. The General Assembly can also meet outside of regularly scheduled sessions as a result of important international events, as will be seen later in this chapter. The Permanent Council is located in Washington and is often found regulating disputes between member states. With the OAS acceptance of the Inter-American Democratic Charter, the Council was also granted the power of enacting diplomatic initiatives in the event of unconstitutional changes of sovereign governments. Once again, each member state has a representative on the Council that holds a single vote. Rather than operating on a majority, the Council requires a two-thirds affirmative vote to pass resolutions. The final body of the OAS, the General Secretariat, acts as the enforcer. Headed by a Secretary General and an Assistant Secretary General that are each

¹⁵⁶ Thomas E. Skidmore, Peter H. Smith, and James N. Green, *Modern Latin America*, 7th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 84-85.

¹⁵⁷ Meyer, *Organization of American States* (CRS Report No. R42639, August 29, 2014), 2.

elected for five-year terms, the General Secretariat must ensure implementation of General Assembly and Permanent Council resolutions.¹⁵⁸ According to a report by the Inter-American Dialogue, it is the Secretary General who is most responsible for both success and failure within the OAS. In theory, a charismatic and driven Secretary General has the ability to push the General Assembly and the Permanent Council to similar ends so that the OAS expresses unified responses to crises.¹⁵⁹

Taking into account Latin American principles of non-intervention and peaceful resolution to conflict, as well as the post-World War II context in which the United States joined the OAS, it should be no surprise that collective regional security was a key objective of the group's creation. In fact, Article I of the OAS Charter reads: "The American States establish by this Charter the international organization that they have developed to achieve an order of peace and justice, to promote their solidarity, to strengthen their collaboration, and to defend their sovereignty, their territorial integrity, and their independence. Within the UN, the Organization of American States is a regional agency."¹⁶⁰ The opening Article plays into the desires of not only the Latin American states, but also the United States, which could benefit from stable, peaceful neighbors.

Over time, the OAS began to develop a broader mission. In 1959, the OAS created the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to comply with the provisions of the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man. Shortly thereafter it branched out into efforts concerning economic, social, cultural, scientific, and even technological ends. A significant development occurred in response to violent human rights abuses by authoritarian regimes in the 1970s with the creation of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in 1978. As drug distribution increased, the OAS created the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission in 1986. Having experienced problems with insurgent groups such as the Shining Path in Peru and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the group also created the Inter-

¹⁵⁸ Meyer, *Organization of American States* (CRS Report No. R42639, August 29, 2014), 2-5.

¹⁵⁹ Inter-American Dialogue, "Responding to the Hemisphere's Political Challenges: Report of the Inter-American Dialogue Task Force on the Organization of American States" (June 2006), 7.

¹⁶⁰ Department of International Law, Organization of American States, Charter of the Organization of American States, http://www.oas.org/dil/treaties_A-41_Charter_of_the_Organization_of_American_States.htm#ch1.

American Committee Against Terrorism in 1999. One of the more recent, and arguably most important, developments within the OAS was the creation and acceptance of the Inter-American Democratic Charter in 2001. As such, the OAS has become much more than an organization based on regional security. It now seeks to boost social and economic development, mediate disputes among member states, and decrease the class divide by eradicating poverty, among other goals. The OAS now claims that defending democracy is its most important role.¹⁶¹

D. OAS AND DEMOCRACY

The evolution of the OAS into a pro-democracy institution is an important one, specifically as it relates to the United States and its relations with Venezuela since 2000, since the OAS became more involved in defending democracy and the United States saw Chávez steering away from democratic principles. As such, it is valuable to provide background regarding some of the key steps in the transition. Although the United States has always had an important role in the OAS, the organization has not always been a promoter of democracy. For example, in 1962 the OAS suspended Cuba due to the latter's communist government, but the organization also actively supported the authoritarian governments of places like Argentina and Chile.¹⁶² Some academics place the beginning of the shift toward supporting democracy at the end of the Cold War, but Andrew F. Cooper and Thomas Legler believe change started even earlier. By the 1970s, much of Latin America was controlled by military dictatorships or authoritarian regimes, many of which committed gross human rights violations. One such country was Nicaragua, under the harsh patriarchal rule of the Somoza family for some 40 years. In 1979, for the first time, the OAS passed a resolution that condemned the Somoza government and its record of human rights violations. Even though the majority of the OAS countries that voted experienced similar situations domestically, including Argentina and Chile, the resolution created two key precedents according to Cooper and

¹⁶¹ Meyer, *Organization of American States* (CRS Report No. R42639, August 29, 2014), 2-3.

¹⁶² Dexter S. Boniface, "Is There a Democratic Norm in the Americas? An Analysis of the Organization of American States," *Global Governance* 8, no. 3 (2002): 365.

Legler: the OAS (1) was capable of and prepared to denounce non-democracies and (2) now had the ability to either legitimize or delegitimize governments across the region.¹⁶³

By 1985, the principle of developing democracy throughout the region continued to advance, this time with the signing of the Protocol of Cartagena de Indias. Amending Article 2 of Chapter 1 of the OAS Charter, the member states of the OAS now were obligated to promote representative democracy while still respecting the principle of nonintervention. Unfortunately, implementation proved problematic and in 1989 the leader of Panama, president Manuel Noriega, showed the intention of cancelling upcoming presidential elections. In response, the OAS passed Resolution 534, the right of the Panamanian people to elect their leaders democratically. This initiative never moved past the resolution, as OAS member states opted not to enforce sanctions or directly condemn Noriega.¹⁶⁴ With the collapse of the Cold War and the events of Panama still in recent history, the OAS passed the Commitment to Democracy and the Renewal of the Inter-American System in Santiago in 1991. Packaged alongside the Commitment to Democracy was Resolution 1080 on representative democracy. The two changes in Santiago laid the institutional groundwork that would allow the OAS to not only use rhetoric to condemn states straying away from democracy, but also the ability to operationally affect states. Acting on its new authority, the OAS has used Resolution 1080 in places like Haiti and Peru to enforce economic sanctions or to create OAS-led fact-finding missions.¹⁶⁵ By the late 1990s, the OAS was a both a political and operational defender of democracy.

The culmination of the OAS transition into a democratic enforcement institution was the signing of the Inter-American Democratic Charter on September 11, 2001. Not only was democracy now declared a right of all people of the Americas, but governments were now formally obligated to promote and defend democracy under the OAS. The passing of the new Charter brought legitimacy and forced acceptance for several

163 Andrew F. Cooper and Thomas Legler, "The OAS Democratic Solidarity Paradigm: Questions of Collective and National Leadership," *Latin American Politics and Society* 43, no. 1 (2001): 105.

164 In the end, the United States intervened and removed Noriega, bypassing the OAS.

165 Cooper and Legler, "OAS Democratic Solidarity," 105–107.

institutions that had been developing within the OAS for years. One such organization that had an effect on the global scale was the electoral observation mission of the OAS. Beginning in the 1960s as a relatively minimal offering by the OAS, electoral monitoring grew to a process that has been used more than 200 times in 27 countries throughout the region. Such efforts have been praised for their impartiality and have helped create similar processes in organizations such as the UN. On multiple occasions the OAS has also provided tools and technical assistance to states looking to strengthen their democracies. Recently, for example, the OAS has been involved in the Mission to Support the Peace Process in Colombia in an effort to an end to FARC violence. The previously mentioned Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and Inter-American Court of Human Rights remain key components of supporting democracy in the region. Rather than being bogged down by the UN's legal system or potentially receiving unfair trials domestically, cases can be both investigated and tried within the OAS. Human rights is not just a reactive issue for the OAS, as the organization constantly monitors and observes human rights within its member states. Finally, the OAS remains committed to regional security, even more so now as it has placed greater importance on stabilizing democracies. Cooperation in the fight against drugs and terrorism is common, and the region remains largely free of inter-state conflict.¹⁶⁶ The OAS now serves as a catch-all institution for handling many matters, both domestic and international.

E. CHALLENGING THE ORDER

While this Chapter follows the United States' role in and relation to the OAS, the broader role of the OAS in the region has shifted, too. Other, competing regional organizations have emerged. Therefore, to the extent that the United States has retained influence in the OAS, at a regional level, that influence has been diluted by the power of the other organizations. Historically the United States has played an important role in the OAS, both politically in setting examples for other states, and economically, providing a significant portion of the budget. The economic trend has continued into the present day, with the United States providing 41 percent of the total OAS budget in FY2013. The

¹⁶⁶ Meyer, *Organization of American States* (CRS Report No. R42639, August 29, 2014), 8–13.

United States also continues to provide an example for developing states in the region regarding democratic principles, providing economic and educational assistance.¹⁶⁷ U.S. political and economic strength does not, however, directly translate to influence in the OAS. Carolyn M. Shaw challenged a commonly held belief that the OAS is a tool of U.S. influence in her article "Limits to Hegemonic Influence in the Organization of American States." Using 30 cases of regional conflict management between 1948 and 2002, she determined that the OAS is more likely to operate in a consensus than to simply bow to U.S. pressure. She highlights four influential factors that play a role in determining how much influence the United States will have: amount of resources needed to carry out resolutions, level of disagreement among Latin American members, threats to regional stability, and unilateral actions by the United States or other member states. According to these hypotheses, the United States will hold more influence in the OAS as resources, threats, or disagreement increases. When Latin American states are acting in a consensus or if the United States has acted unilaterally and without the consent of the OAS, the United States is less likely to achieve favorable outcomes.¹⁶⁸

Even if the U.S. is not as influential within the OAS as one may think, other organizations have emerged nonetheless that challenge the OAS as a whole. One such organization is the Summit of the Americas, created in 1994 by an initiative of U.S. President Bill Clinton. The Summit of the Americas called for periodic meetings among all of the democratically elected heads of state within the region. The Summit was designed to cut through layers of bureaucracy within the OAS and to enact policies at a quicker pace. Created as a presidential initiative, the OAS was left out of the planning and organizing of the first Summit in Miami, and many leaders welcomed the chance to meet directly with fellow leaders. According to Robin L. Rosenberg, the eagerness to reinvigorate hemispheric cooperation at the presidential level blinded leaders from realizing that they were in essence creating a duplicate forum from multilateralism within the region. The first Summit was largely successful and out of it came a requirement for

¹⁶⁷ Meyer, *Organization of American States* (CRS Report No. R42639, August 29, 2014), 5.

¹⁶⁸ Carolyn M. Shaw, "Limits to Hegemonic Influence in the Organization of American States," *Latin American Politics and Society* 45, no. 3 (2003): 80-82.

the OAS to follow up on many of the mandates that were agreed to by Summit states. Recognizing the potential for the Summit of the Americas process to grow too powerful, the Secretary General of the OAS asked to play a more important role and ultimately created the OAS Committee on Summits Management. Now, in addition to its already existing roles, the OAS also helps plan, coordinate, and follow-up with member states to ensure compliance with Summit outcomes. Rather than completely absorbing the Summit, the OAS instead plays a pivotal role in its efficiency.¹⁶⁹ Although the intention of the Summit was not to take away from the importance of the OAS, it inadvertently weakened the organization by both downplaying its efficiency and requiring it to create new bodies to account for the actions taken by the Summit.

Perhaps the largest challengers to the OAS are the Bolivarian Alliance of the Americas (ALBA) and the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR). Created in 2004 by Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez, ALBA strives to promote regional integration, socioeconomic reform, and poverty alleviation. ALBA is important to this discussion because it opposes the United States and, for the most part, the OAS. Consisting of nine states, many of which are politically aligned to socialist or communist ideologies such as Cuba, Venezuela, and Bolivia, the group is based on the principles created by Simón Bolívar in the 1800s.¹⁷⁰ Some academics and U.S. policymakers believe that ALBA is not a real threat to either the OAS or U.S. interests in Latin America, but that has not stopped the introduction of House Resolution 1687 from being introduced into the U.S. House of Representatives. The resolution, which is currently awaiting action by the House Subcommittee on Immigration and Border Security, would require the U.S. Permanent Representative to the OAS to reiterate the importance of Human Rights and for the U.S. President to impose sanctions against officials of ALBA associated with violating said human rights.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ Robin L. Rosenberg, "The OAS and the Summit of the Americas: Coexistence, or Integration of Forces for Multilateralism," *Latin American Politics and Society* 43, no. 1 (2001): 84-94.

¹⁷⁰ Mark P. Sullivan, *Latin America and the Caribbean: Key Issues for the 113th Congress* (CRS Report No. R42956) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, February 15, 2014), 9.

¹⁷¹ Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, *H.R. 1687 - Countering ALBA Act of 2013* (Washington, DC: Office of Congressional Information and Publishing, April 23, 2013).

UNASUR, on the other hand, has taken a less combative approach toward the OAS and the United States but still chooses to promote south-south relations that exclude North America. Consisting of 12 South American countries, UNASUR promotes political, economic, and security coordination throughout the continent. Whereas ALBA has not presented significant challenges to the authority and mission of the OAS, UNASUR has been called on in multiple instances to decrease tensions between two states and to serve as a mediator.¹⁷² Thanks largely to support from Brazil, UNASUR emerged in 2008 as an umbrella organization that unified the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) and the Andean Community of Nations. Although the union was created around two economic organizations, UNASUR was created as a political solution and counter to the OAS.¹⁷³ Once again, the creation of an organization that was exclusive to Latin American states was appealing and chipped away at the influence of the OAS in the region.

Even when up against other organizations such as the Summit of the Americas, ALBA, or UNASUR, the OAS has remained relevant in the international order. In 2013, for example, the General Assembly adopted three declarations and 49 resolutions in its 43rd session in Antigua, Guatemala. In what has become common since the establishment of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Declaration 71 stressed the importance of human rights education within its member states. The Declaration came as a result of nearly a decade of research and reports completed by the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights.¹⁷⁴

The OAS also found itself involved in disputes extending beyond the Americas. Declaration 72 encouraged Argentina to continue on its path toward peacefully negotiating a settlement of its dispute with the United Kingdom over the Malvinas Islands. Its third declaration that year, Declaration of Antigua Guatemala For a Comprehensive Policy Against the World Drug Problem in the Americas, set forth

¹⁷² Sullivan, *Latin America and the Caribbean* (CRS Report No. R42956, February 15, 2014), 9.

¹⁷³ Jorge Hein, "Regional Integration and Political Cooperation in Latin America," *Latin American Research Review* 47, no. 3 (2012): 214–15.

¹⁷⁴ General Assembly, Organization of American States, *Forty-Third Regular Session Proceedings Volume* (La Antigua, Guatemala: General Secretariat, Organization of American States, June 4-6, 2013).

multiple steps in which OAS members will come together to continue developing an effective solution toward stopping illegal drugs in the region. Of the 49 resolutions, topics varied from economic, security, policy, mediation, and many more.¹⁷⁵ Regardless of efforts by alternative regional institutions, either advertently or inadvertently, to decrease the effectiveness of the OAS, the fact that declarations and resolutions continue to be made shows that member states still view it as a valid form of mediation in international affairs.

F. THE UNITED STATES, VENEZUELA, AND THE OAS

The previous two chapters have highlighted what has often been a tumultuous relationship between the United States and Venezuela since the beginning of the new millennium. Throughout the same time period, U.S. policymakers have rarely pursued proactive measures toward addressing Venezuelan affairs through the OAS, even though academics as recently as this year have made such a recommendation. In his testimony to the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations regarding Venezuela's early 2014 political crisis, Venezuelan and Senior Associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Moisés Naím made five recommendations for the United States to engage with Venezuela. Three of his five recommendations included using international organizations such as the OAS to confront Venezuela because of the negative effect experienced in the past of bilateral negotiations with either Chávez or current president Nicolás Maduro. Naím's theory is that the United States must identify topics that would generally be accepted by consensus within the OAS but that would also be contradictory to current events in Venezuela. He believes that fact-finding institutions within the OAS could identify human rights violations, corruption, and other problems within Venezuela that would contradict the democratic principles of the OAS. Although it is easy for Maduro to deny the accusations when coming directly from the United States, it would be much more difficult to deny them when they come in the form of a consensus vote of the OAS.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ OAS, *Forty-Third Regular Session*, 1–10.

¹⁷⁶ Moisés Naím, "Can the United States Play a Role in Venezuela," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* (May 8, 2014), 1–6.

If the United States does choose to engage Venezuela through the OAS, are there any implications that it would actually work? This chapter will now look at four events where relations between the United States and Venezuela were tense and how the OAS responded. Looking at events that occurred post-Cold War, the first significant tension within Venezuela were the two coup attempts that occurred in 1992. Having experienced 40 years of democratic stability between two political parties, albeit rife with corruption, the armed forces, led by Chávez, attempted to overthrow the elected president Carlos Andrés Pérez. For the United States, instability in Venezuela meant instability for a region that was seeing a significant terrorist threat with groups such as the Shining Path in Peru. The coup attempt failed shortly after it began, but the OAS Permanent Council went ahead with a special session the same day to address the issue. No formal intervention occurred because President Pérez retained power, but the OAS did reiterate its right to take necessary action according to Resolution 1080 if something were to happen to Pérez. The OAS also expressed its support for the president and condemned the uprising. Just nine months later, a second coup, this time led by the air force and select leftist organizations, attempted to overthrow Pérez. Much more violent and without as much popular support, the coup failed once again. Again the OAS expressed support for Pérez and democracy, condemned the conspirators, and took no further action.¹⁷⁷ Even though both coup attempts failed, the OAS nonetheless missed these flashpoints to address the issues within Venezuela that led to the coup attempts. As mentioned in Section 4 of this chapter, the OAS was still young in terms of defending democracy at this point.

Ten years later, democracy in Venezuela was challenged once again with the April 11, 2002 coup attempt against Chávez.¹⁷⁸ For as much confusion as there was in Venezuela at the time of the coup attempt, Latin American heads of state and the OAS faced their own dilemmas about how to react. By coincidence, many of the Latin American presidents and their foreign ministers were in Costa Rica for a meeting of the

¹⁷⁷ Barry S. Levitt, "A Desultory Defense of Democracy: OAS Resolution 1080 and the Inter-American Democratic Charter," *Latin American Politics and Society* 48, no. 3 (2006): 104.

¹⁷⁸ See Chapter II for further discussion.

Rio Group at the time of the coup attempt. They promptly responded with a statement condemning the unlawful change of constitutional order and requesting a special session of the OAS Permanent Council in accordance with the Inter-American Democratic Charter. While some governments went on to make their own statements condemning the events in Venezuela, the United States, Colombia, and El Salvador all accepted the Carmona government and what they deemed a resignation by Chávez. During the Permanent Council special session held the same night of the coup attempt in Washington, D.C., the OAS Secretary General and council chairman initially denied the Venezuelan representative permission to join the meeting.¹⁷⁹ The Secretary General ultimately changed course and allowed the Venezuelan representative to join the session the following day, but the initial denial represented a certain lack of assurance displayed by the individual responsible for setting the tone within the OAS, the Secretary General.

By the time the Permanent Council met on April 13, masses of Venezuelans had gathered together to demand the return of Chávez. Details were beginning to emerge within Venezuela that Chávez had not resigned, and military officials were beginning to feel betrayed by actions taken by Carmona. In response, Carmona reinstated the National Assembly, but by then the tide was too strong, and Carmona resigned by 10:00 p.m. on April 13.¹⁸⁰

The Permanent Council was in session for the majority of that day, trying to keep up with the events in Venezuela to determine appropriate actions. With Argentina, Mexico, Brazil, and Canada adamantly denouncing Carmona as being the illegitimate leader of Venezuela, the United States and Colombia remained by his side. Attempting to use the Inter-American Democratic Charter to its favor, the United States argued that Chávez had acted unconstitutionally, therefore warranting removal from office.¹⁸¹

When the Permanent Council finally published its resolution condemning the unconstitutional change of government, Chávez was already back in power. The

179 Levitt, "Desultory Defense of Democracy," 110–12.

180 Ibid., 112–13.

181 Ibid.

resolution did, however, take further action by calling for an OAS fact-finding mission and a special General Assembly meeting. Less than a week afterward, when the General Assembly met, it formally expressed satisfaction with Chávez's return to power and the restoration of constitutional order in Venezuela.¹⁸² For the United States, Chávez's anti-imperialism governing style was worrisome and establishing favor with the Carmona regime early could have signified a swing in the relationship. Instead, the United States isolated itself as a minority within the OAS and furthered Chávez's suspicion of U.S. meddling in Venezuelan affairs.

As has been a recurring theme in Venezuela, democracy was challenged for the third time in just over thirty years, this time under Maduro's presidency in 2014. This time around, there was no formal coup attempt against Maduro, but massive protests demanded that he step down. In 2013, Venezuela had a homicide rate of 39 per 100,000 inhabitants, one of the worst in the world. Crime, corruption, a strengthened political opposition, and a less charismatic leader in Maduro all boiled over in February 2014 with students taking to the street to protest violent crimes on campus. Some groups were met with violence at the hands of the state, so the protests grew. Recognizing an opportunity to enact change, the opposition Democratic Unity (MUD) alliance joined the protest, with some MUD branches asking for Maduro's resignation.¹⁸³

How did the OAS respond to the increasing unrest between Maduro's government and the opposition? Venezuela's foreign and domestic policies had created a significant divide among OAS countries, with most either being adamantly in support of or adamantly against the Venezuelan government. Such a division created a stalemate within the OAS, with the organization taking no formal actions until March 7, 2014, despite the Inter-American Democratic Charter, which required that the OAS at least convene a special session to address the issue. Even when the OAS did take action, it came in the form of a Permanent Council resolution expressing support for the democratic institutions of Venezuela and its ability to control the social unrest. The

¹⁸² Levitt, "Desultory Defense of Democracy," 112–13.

¹⁸³ "Venezuela: Tipping Point," Policy Briefing, *International Crisis Group* (Caracas/Bogotá/Brussels, May 21, 2014), 6–10.

resolution specifically highlighted the principle of nonintervention that has long been a deciding factor in the OAS. As expected, the vote to pass the resolution was a consensus, but there were two states that voted with reservation: Panama and the United States. Panama voted with reservations regarding some of the wording in the resolution, while the United States was alone in its vote against the resolution. Among its many problems with the decision was the belief that any dialogue Maduro has with the opposition will be useless as the opposition will not be granted the necessary freedoms to engage in true negotiation.¹⁸⁴ With the OAS choosing to only enact a resolution, UNASUR filled the action void and sent a large delegation of foreign ministers to Caracas to initiate negotiations between the government, the MUD, students, and human rights organizations. UNASUR also incorporated the Catholic Church, inviting Vatican Secretary of State Pietro Parolin to the talks.¹⁸⁵ The United States and the OAS missed yet another chance to develop a positive presence in Venezuela.

G. CONCLUSION

Since its foundation in 1948, the OAS has been at the forefront of promoting regional cooperation. Over time, it developed from an institution largely designed to negotiate conflicts between states to one that can prevent and respond to a variety of interstate conflicts. In the last 10 to 15 years, however, other regional institutions have chipped away at the importance of the OAS. Tired of being bogged down by its multiple layers of bureaucracy and the perception that it is still heavily influenced by the United States, Latin Americans welcomed the arrival of alternatives such as UNASUR or ALBA. Nevertheless, the OAS remains the most institutionally developed regional organization in Latin America, and one of the few that encompasses nearly every state from North America, Central America, South America, and the Caribbean. The organization has proven most successful when its members can act unanimously and under a consensus. When members disagree about an appropriate course of action, however, it often grinds to a halt, leaving a void that can be filled by other regional

¹⁸⁴ “Solidarity and Support for Democratic Institutions, Dialogue, and Peace in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela” (Washington, DC: Permanent Council, Organization of American States, March 7, 2014), 1–10.

¹⁸⁵ “Tipping Point,” *International Crisis Group*, 20–22.

organizations or through unilateral intervention. Regarding Venezuela, the United States has often voted against the majority in the OAS, causing not only friction within the organization, but also inadvertently isolating itself from other member states.

V. CONCLUSION

A. EFFECT OF U.S. FOREIGN POLICY WITH VENEZUELA

Can U.S. foreign policy towards Venezuela be directly linked to a decrease in U.S. influence in the region? For sure the rise of Chávez and new international organizations coincided with a lack of U.S. interest in the region. In his March 2014 testimony to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, former U.S. Ambassador to Venezuela Otto Reich stresses the negative effects of declining U.S. presence in Latin America and the OAS:

Part of the price of U.S. disengagement from Latin America can now be seen in such reprehensible spectacles as those witnessed this month at the OAS in which, for example, a member of the elected Venezuelan legislature representing the peaceful dissident movement and duly invited by an OAS Member State, was not allowed to speak, while earlier a majority of the OAS members voted to support the violent repression that the entire world has seen on video: uniformed soldiers, plain-clothes police and government-organized militia beating, shooting and killing unarmed civilians, mostly students and even a pregnant woman.¹⁸⁶

The testimony is often fiery and potentially even exaggerated, but Mr. Reich is trying to get the point across that the lack of attention the United States has paid to Latin America is having negative affects not just within the region, but across the entire international system in which the states of the western hemisphere operate. Reich's testimony speaks specifically to a decrease in U.S. engagement with Latin America, but it also describes a lack of U.S. influence within the OAS. The current role and effectiveness of the United States in the OAS can be described as a result of its anti-Chávez and anti-Maduro foreign policy. As highlighted in the previous chapter, the United States found it outside of the majority on two key OAS resolutions: the 2002 coup and the 2014 protests. By choosing to go against the consensus regarding Venezuela, the United States has isolated itself and lost influence within the organization.

¹⁸⁶ Otto Reich, "U.S. Disengagement from Latin America: Compromised Security and Economic Interests," U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere (March 25, 2014), 4.

B. ALTERNATE EXPLANATIONS

U.S. foreign policy is not alone responsible for the decrease in U.S. influence in the region. As outlined in Chapter II, one of Chávez's many goals was to decrease U.S. influence and he was successful in this effort as far as creating and strengthening other organizations to counter the OAS, specifically ALBA and UNASUR, two groups spearheaded by Chávez that excluded the United States. UNASUR in particular has even come to take the place of the OAS, acting as the mediator for the most recent social unrest in Venezuela. When combined with a decrease in OAS presence from the United States, Latin American-specific groups have helped decrease U.S. influence in the region. Further research is required to see just to what extent groups like ALBA, MERCOSUR, and UNASUR have attributed to the U.S. decline.

Yet another factor that cannot be ignored is the effect of Edward Snowden's classified leaks in 2013. Snowden, a former U.S. National Security Agency analyst, released numerous classified documents, many of which implicated the U.S. government in illegally monitoring calls of Latin American presidents. The event had severe implications for U.S. relations in the region, with many Latin American countries denouncing the actions and restructuring their foreign policies toward the United States. A particularly low point was the stranding of Bolivian president Evo Morales in Vienna as U.S. allies stopped air traffic in a search for Snowden. The Snowden leaks and subsequent ripple effect of negative reactions across Latin America certainly played a role in decreasing U.S. influence in the region, even if relations have improved as of late.¹⁸⁷

The leaks of Edward Snowden and the rise of non-OAS regional organizations have played a role in the decrease of U.S. influence in Latin America. They do not, however, discredit the role played by U.S. foreign policy toward Venezuela. Efforts by the United States decreased its ability to act on its own interests within the OAS, subsequently decreasing the overall influence of the United States in Latin America.

¹⁸⁷ H.C., P.G., and M.R., "South Americans in Glasshouses," *Economist*, July 22, 2013, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/americasview/2013/07/latin-america-and-edward-snowden>.

C. WHAT NEXT?

The United States has an opportunity to both increase its presence in the region and reinvigorate relations with one of its staunchest regional opponents by promoting and investing in the OAS. Investing means more than just financing the organization; the United States must also assign strong leaders to its OAS postings and truly support its decision-making processes. The history of the OAS proves that the organization has the necessary institutions to enforce change and that it is rather effective when votes are by consensus. Rather than engaging in battles of rhetoric in the media with Venezuela, U.S. officials should seek out matters of mutual consensus through the OAS. To ultimately protect its interests in the region, the United States must win back the trust of OAS member states, it must work itself back into the consensus. Only then can it engage in meaningful diplomacy with Venezuela.

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